

TURKEY GEAR: DECOYS, BLINDS, AND LOADS

OUTDOOR LIFE

APRIL 2015

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- PITCH AN UMBRELLA
DUCK BLIND

Want to be
this guy?
See p. 32

PADDFISH:
MAKE YOUR OWN
REDNECK CAVIAR

WHITETAILS:
NEW RULES FOR
TROPHY BUCKS

CRAPPIES:
FIND WARM
WATER, FIND
SLABS

TESTED:
5 HOT NEW
FLY RODS

ACTION!
Big-buck hunter
Mark Kenyon
leads the
new-media
charge.

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In Oklahoma, paddlefish snaggers must donate the eggs from their fish to the state. What gives?

BY STEVE WAGNER

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BY TONY HANSEN, MARK KENYON, AND ALEX ROBINSON

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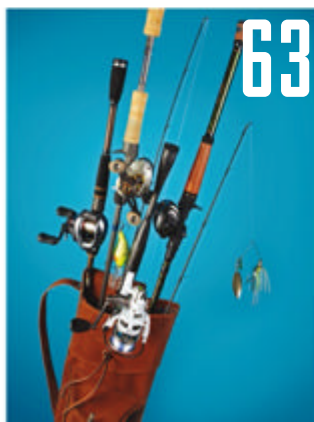
COVER STORY
MAKING IT

Meet half a dozen people who make a living in the outdoors. Plus, more than 20 awesome DIY projects and hacks that will save you cash.

BY THE EDITORS



COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY
ANDREW HETHERINGTON





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THE

LIFE

WAYPOINT



APRIL 25
8:09 A.M.

CROSS-TIE STRUTTER / Springfield, MO

On the edge of Missouri's Ozarks lies a crossroads where a trail intersects a set of freight tracks. With a creek nearby, it's a gathering place of sorts for gobblers. All the Easterns know about it—and so does photographer Rick Adair. After a few quick yelps on his box call, Adair reached down to fish his camera from his pack. When he looked back up, he was startled to see this longbeard in full feather on what had been empty tracks just seconds before. "I'm thinking, *How did he get there so fast?*" Adair says. "He was the perfect model. He turned this way, turned that way, then gobbled as if on cue."

THE NEXT BIG THING



THE LIFE
EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Banking Bucks

MY NEW RULE FOR DEER SEASON:
TAKE 'EM IF YOU'VE GOT 'EM

A couple of years ago, the deer-management bug bit me—hard. I hung trail cameras. I planted food plots. And I dreamed big about the giant bucks that I'd kill on my land along Montana's Milk River.

For a few years I made a job of not killing beautiful deer. Not old enough, I'd tell myself. Not big enough. Oh, how much better those bucks in my bow sight and rifle scope would look on my wall next year.

Then epizootic hemorrhagic disease hit the Milk River area, and I made a job of dragging putrid deer carcasses out of alfalfa fields. During pheasant season that year, I carried a short-stroke saw in my bird vest, and I filled my shop with the stinking racks of EHD-killed bucks I found in the cattails and hay fields all along the valley.

When the mortality was quantified, biologists reckoned we lost about 90 percent of the whitetails along the Milk. To me, it seemed like all of them were those gorgeous bucks that I hadn't killed.

That year reset my priorities. It made me realize that what I value about deer is their unpredictability. The way they can suddenly appear. Or disappear. The way they resist being owned or managed. But the wildness that I cherish also makes them a perishable commodity. They can get hit by a car, killed by a neighbor, or die of disease.

Starting on p. 57 in this issue, a number of contributors write about several new "rules" for whitetail management. The piece details how our collective relationship with deer is changing as herd dynamics ebb and flow—but mostly ebb—across whitetail country. My favorite of these rules is that we hunters need to revise our expectations of what constitutes a



great buck, or a great season.

That's what EHD did for me. My personal rule is that I no longer "bank" bucks for next year, because it's such a long shot that I'll ever encounter them again. I would much rather have killed one of those next-year bucks to adorn my wall and feed my family than have it rot in a field.

Sure, I'd prefer to hold out for a whopper. But not if that means I can't enjoy the unexpected gift of a fine deer in the right place, at the right time.

Intensive management of whitetails has turned deer hunting into a sort of job for many of us, and we've turned what should be an enjoyable experience into a series of situational dilemmas: Is he old enough? Is he big enough?

I don't wish the catastrophe of EHD on any other hunter, but what my experience has taught me is that it's far more satisfying to take the deer that you have rather than wait for the deer that may never come.

ANDREW MCKEAN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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(coming April 2015)



THREE CHEERS

► The February issue was the best *Outdoor Life* I've read in a long time. The articles were informative, interesting, well-written, to the point, and not too long. I loved the story on the young trappers, the review of the Remington muzzleloader, and the accuracy tips. Keep up the good work.

*Richard Brady
Flint Hill, VA*

OUT OF LINE

► After seeing the conibear trap on p. 60 of "Holding the Line" [Feb. 2015], my blood pressure went through the roof. Are you trying to encourage trapping newcomers to use that dry land set? There is no "catch and release" with these killing traps. I hunt with both bird dogs and hounds. I'm concerned with how I might react if I ever found one of them dead in such a set.

*Calvin White
Bryant, WI*

OPEN YOUR TRAP

► *OL* doesn't pay much attention to trapping, so it was good to read "Holding the Line." I think big outdoor magazines avoid trapping for fear of political blowback; no doubt some people who accept hunting remain against trapping. But these days all conservationists should stand united.

*Tioughnioga
via OutdoorLife.com*

CALLED OUT

► I've used Circe calls since they were made of wood and find the claims in your article

"One Call to Rule Them All" [Feb. 2015] difficult to swallow. Hard to freeze, unlike exposed reed calls? Ability to howl?

The Circe is a fine call, but I think you're either leg-humping for a Circe Pro-Staff patch or you're mistaking the Circe for a Crit'R Call or a Krusty Krier.

*Richard Roop
Safford, AZ*

USED GUNS

► I chuckled when I read "Gun Smuggling" [Feb. 2015], which contained the dreaded question, "How many guns do you own, dear?" I suspect many men have heard this from spouses who don't understand that you can never have too many guns.

After several of these exchanges, I initiated a new policy to avoid future familial confrontations. I decided to buy only used guns. Now, anytime I return home and find myself facing the question, "Is that a new gun?" I can truthfully say no. This keeps the peace, and I get to keep my guns.

*Joseph D. Hanley
Cibola, TX*

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THE LIFE
MY OUTDOOR LIFE

LONE STAR

TEXAS WHITETAIL ADDICT AND VATOVILLE RANCH WILDLIFE MANAGER BILLY BOB GALBREATH TALKS DROUGHT, BAITING, AND THE BURDEN OF A NICKNAME **BY ANDREW MCKEAN**

Galbreath hoses down carcasses after a successful hunt.



OUTDOOR LIFE: As hunting manager on a big Texas ranch, you're balancing wildlife with cattle and oil production. Do deer get the short straw on a working ranch?

BILLY BOB GALBREATH: I'm probably as protective of our deer as the cowboys are of their cattle. I worry about them when the weather gets cold, or that we might be killing too many. Normally there's a pretty good balance, but the ongoing drought here on the Edwards Plateau has taken a toll. There's not enough natural forage to go around like there used to be.

OL: But you also bait. Is that to sustain the deer, or to make them easier to hunt?

BBG: A little of both. We supplement their natural diet with feed, and use it to concentrate them. But those older bucks have figured out feeders are dangerous. Trail cams prove they're nocturnal. The better bucks I've seen will come in a full hour or two after the feeder goes off.

OL: Your regular job is bridge inspector for the state. How did you start moonlighting as a wildlife manager?

BBG: I met Steve [Anderson, the owner of Vatooville Ranch] when I asked if I could hunt some does. We hit it off and he kept asking me back, and I kept coming. Now I'm down here so often that I neglect my own homestead, at least according to my wife.

OL: You have two first names, but everybody on the ranch calls you "Bunk." How did you get that handle?

BBG: My father said I could fall asleep just about anywhere.

OL: Hunters kill more than 100 deer every year on Vatooville Ranch. Do you handle them all?

BBG: I used to gut and prep every one of those deer, but lately I've gotten some help. The most important thing to us is making sure the meat is cared for properly. And I always take the jaw to age them and assess their health.

OL: What's the oldest deer you've seen?

BBG: Probably an 8-year-old, but she didn't have any teeth left. We've seen 10-inch-long hooves, antler beams that crossed over each other, healed-over wounds. It's always interesting to see deer up close after you've seen so many at a distance for so long.

OL: You're a self-described "whitetail addict." What other animals do you hope to hunt?

BBG: My father and uncle both killed big mule deer on the Kaibab National Forest, and I'd love to do the same. I want to kill an elk, but my house isn't big enough for the kind of bull I'd like to tag.



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DR. JEKYLL AND MR. SPIES

KEEPING THE PEACE BETWEEN A SPORTSMAN AND HIS ALTER EGO **BY BENNY SPIES**

As a hunter, I have always maintained that if the right opportunity presented itself on a game animal, I wouldn't hesitate for a second. I'd take the shot, then and there, before my quarry could slip away. But this sensible philosophy directly conflicts with my chosen line of work. As the host of an outdoors TV show, I am only allowed to shoot when the cameras are rolling. Don't get me wrong—I love the spotlight. Problem is, my first instincts are those of a hunter, and my television hosting obligations finish a distant second.

So one sunny South Dakota afternoon found that second, pestering voice inside me screaming, "Don't shoot, you idiot!"

In my sights stood the biggest pronghorn buck ever to roam the South Dakota prairies. He paused, statue-still and perfectly positioned beside four girlfriends, his horns towering like skyscrapers.

It was filming season and I had one tag left. I had just inched forward through hundreds of yards of cactus and rocks to within 60 yards of the monster. I stared at him through my crosshairs, and he was none the wiser to my presence. Perfect.

Except for one problem: My cameraman lay ensnared in a jungle of sagebrush 15 yards behind me, a mouse in a glue trap. He tried to reposition himself, and five sets of curious eyes locked onto us. As the TV host scrambled for the pause button, the hunter reached for the trigger.

"Wait," hissed my cameraman. *Boom*, cracked my rifle.

The buck fell dead and his ladies fled. I guess you could say I blew it. My TV folks certainly did. And keeping them happy is critical for keeping my job, so I vowed to heed my other half in the future.

Fast-forward to this year. I was fulfilling my life-long dream of hunting harlequin ducks on the Puget Sound. Washington's limit is just one bird per season, and everything from weather conditions to my shooting abilities weighed on me. But the plan was foolproof. The decoys were bobbing, the boats were anchored, and the film crew was briefed on flight patterns.

Just after legal light, a pair of harlequins flapped toward us. We shuffled into position, and the birds flared. They must have noticed the six people, three shotguns, two cameras, and a partridge in a pear tree floating conspicuously on the water.

My nerves twitched, and the stress built. Minutes turned into hours. We couldn't leave without footage for a new episode.

Then suddenly, out of the wild blue sky, there emerged a single mature drake. He was on a mission from God, flying lightning fast and unfazed by the decoys.

The mediator inside me struggled to wait for the cameras, but the battle was already lost. I seized my shotgun and fired. My dream duck dropped out of the sky. It had all unfolded in seconds—and the cameras only captured the tail end of the action.

So, you might wonder, what have I learned over the years? Nothing, if you ask the TV execs. But I've discovered a little something. Considering I've taken my love of the outdoors and burdened it with the stressors of a career, I'm still first and foremost a hunter. And I'm okay with that—because I won't be on television forever.

ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT WILDFIRES.



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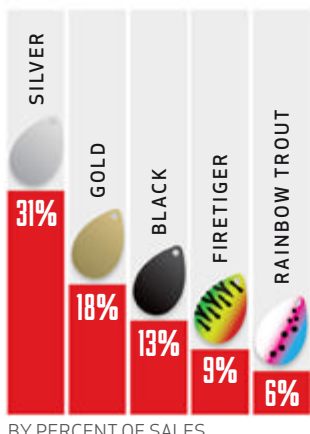
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EDITOR'S CHOICE ♦ GREAT BUY ♦ TEST RESULTS

GEAR





FIELD TEST

FLY ROD FACE-OFF

✦ WE HIT THE WATER TO
CAST, MEND, SET HOOKS,
AND FIGHT BIG FISH WITH THE
NEW CROP OF TROUT RODS
BY JOHN B. SNOW

T

Trout are king in the world of flyfishing. And while you can find fly rods geared toward every type of sport fish that swims and every imaginable fishing technique, freshwater trout rods account for nearly three-quarters of the fly-rod market.

The 9-foot 5-weight is the most popular and workhorse-like configuration—think of it as flyfishing's .30/06. As such, it is expected to do it all, from tackling small, snaggy freestone creeks to large, windy Western rivers. That's a tall order, as it takes a special rod to be able to fish everything from size-22 dries to weighted size-4 streamers.

Fortunately, we can report that each of the rods in this evaluation is up to those challenges. It is also heartening to note that these capable fishing tools are being offered at price points to suit most budgets. To see how they performed in our head-to-head shakedown, read on.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

ORVIS
RECON

WEIGHT: 2.75 OZ.
\$425/ORVIS.COM

This rod's name evokes back-country adventure and exploration with a tactical, or at least tough-guy, edge, and the Recon lives up to that promise. The price might be hard for a casual angler to swallow, but it feels justified based on how well the rod is designed and how it performs.

User-friendly features include alignment dots that make quick work of assembly, especially in low light, and dual rings on the uplocking reel seat to keep the reel firmly in place over a long day of fishing.

The shadow-green blank, black nickel reel seat, and dark wood insert give the rod a stealthy vibe. The quality of the cork was good—not great—but the shape and feel of the handle were as comfortable as you could ask for.

The Recon's most noticeable attribute is the amount of control it provides. It booms out casts and manipulates line nearly effortlessly. Its accuracy, for targets both near and far, was the most impressive of all the rods in the test. It delivered flies to hard-to-reach seams with pinpoint precision.

As befits a 9-foot 5-weight, the Recon is tremendously versatile. It can definitely hold its own on small brush-choked creeks or broad, windswept rivers. It was able to flick out snag-defying casts with not much line beyond the tiptop, and shoot line into the next zip code when called upon.

The rod's stout backbone gives it the authority required to strip a heavy streamer through fast water and then handle the kype-jawed monster that latches on.

GREAT BUY

DOUGLAS
DFX 5904

WEIGHT: 2.85 OZ.
\$325/DOUGLAS
OUTDOORS.COM

The Douglas brand might be new to the fishing market, but the man behind the company is not: Jim Murphy was responsible for putting Redington rods on the market many years ago, offering very good fly rods at excellent prices with an attractive warranty.

Douglas fly rods are built along this same appealing model. The DFX is the company's high-end offering at \$325. The rods are built in the U.S. on high-modulus blanks and constructed with an excellent taper that provides all-around solid fishing characteristics.

The grip on the DFX was one of the beefiest in the test, but its hand-filling dimensions didn't detract from the way the versatile rod performed. It aerialized line easily and was able to dredge weighted nymphs out of the water with ease for efficient casting. It performed roll casts very well and was quite accurate. The DFX isn't a flashy rod, but it hits a real sweet spot when it comes to performance and value.

On the design side, the dual uplocking rings on the reel seat are a nice touch that helped keep the reel from slopping around. The fit on the ferrules was good as well. The rod never came loose while being fished.

It wasn't quite as responsive as some of the more expensive rods in the field, but it certainly held its own. This journeyman's tool can take on pretty much any fishing task. Expect to see a generation of young, budget-minded anglers jump on the Douglas bandwagon.





SAGE ACCEL 590-4

WEIGHT: 2.95 OZ.

\$595/SAGEFLYFISH.COM

The Accel's half-wells cork handle is smooth and free of unsightly pores, and it fits perfectly in hand. The attractive blank is super sensitive, transmitting the slightest ticks of a weighted nymph. Given how slender the rod is, it has a surprising amount of backbone. It mended line very well, but it didn't seem as sharp as a couple of the less-expensive entries. It cast extremely well and was able to deliver everything from small dries to bulky streamers. The Accel did a good job of tossing tight loops and it shot line an impressive distance. A lifetime warranty takes away some of the sting of the price.

WINSTON NEXUS

WEIGHT: 2.75 OZ.

\$485/WINSTONRODS.COM

Building the Nexus on a blank of 100 percent graphite, as opposed to the more costly Boron III, allowed Winston to offer it at a much lower price than is typical of its rods. This consummate trout rod casts instinctively and is marvelously sensitive. It's stiff enough to make lightning-fast hooksets and has plenty of backbone to fight surly browns. Controlling loop size and line position was simple, making for excellent presentations. The bad news: The reel seat fell off during testing. The adhesive let go and it came apart. This is easy to fix, but it's not what you want (or expect) in a high-end rod.

CABELA'S THEOREM 905-4

WEIGHT: 2.70 OZ.

\$260/CABELAS.COM

This value-oriented offering performed serviceably during the evaluation. On targets within 35 feet, where the majority of trout fishing occurs, it was deadly accurate. It can swing a streamer, turn over a diminutive PMD, and cast a hopper-dropper rig. The grip is comfortable, and it balances nicely in hand. However, the Theorem has its limitations. The rod had a tendency to bottom out, and it gave muted feedback. Casting longer distances was a chore, and it lacked the backbone exhibited by the other rods. It also had the least lively feel. For the price, however, it is still an attractive option.

TEST RESULTS

SCORES AND PRICES, AT A GLANCE

FLY RODS	PRICE	PERFORMANCE						DESIGN			VALUE	TOTAL
		MENDING	ACCURACY	DISTANCE	VERSATILITY	BACKBONE	SENSITIVITY	CRAFTSMANSHIP	ERGONOMICS	AESTHETICS		
ORVIS RECON EDITOR'S CHOICE	\$425	8	10	9	9	10	9	9	10	9	9	92
SAGE ACCEL 590-4	\$595	8	8	9	9	10	10	9	9	10	8	90
WINSTON NEXUS	\$485	9	10	8	9	9	9	8	9	10	8	89
DOUGLAS DFX 5904 GREAT BUY	\$325	8	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	10	83
CABELA'S THEOREM 905-4	\$260	7	8	7	8	7	7	7	8	7	9	75



OTHER NOTABLE RODS

1 G. LOOMIS PRO 4X SWITCH \$480/GLOOMIS.COM

Switch rods are designed to be fished with either one or two hands, depending on the fishing situation. They excel on broad rivers, when you're fishing against steep backdrops, and under windy conditions. They allow the angler to snap out a T-cast when there's no room for a traditional backcast, and to punch out long overhead casts to hard-to-reach lies. The new Pro 4X Switch from Loomis is a nicely balanced switch rod. Its 10-foot 6-inch length strikes the right compromise. It can be wielded with reasonable comfort with one hand, yet it has the length and leverage to perform Spey casts. In a 5-weight, it can handle trout and lighter steelhead and salmon duties.

2 REDINGTON VAPEN BLACK 590-4B \$350/REDINGTON.COM

This is an updated version of the original red-handled Redington model launched a couple of years ago. The Vapen is notable for the construction of its handle, which is made of polymer instead of traditional cork. To create this unique fly rod grip, Redington turned to Winn Grips, which makes grips for golf clubs. I was prepared to not like the Vapen, and initially I wasn't crazy about the squishy feel of the grip. But after fishing it, I have to say I took a shine to the concept. I don't know if the grip amplifies casting power or reduces fatigue, as Redington claims, but I can say that I didn't feel hampered in any way by the technology.



JUST THE TIPPET

THE FISHPOND HEADGATE KEEPS SPOOLS HANDY

I've taken a real liking to this sturdy tippet holder from Fishpond. It is made of aluminum and has a spring-loaded latch that keeps the crossbar that holds the tippet spools securely in place, yet it is easy to open when necessary. It holds up to seven spools of tippet and has a handy razorblade cutter to slice off segments of tippet as you pull them free. It clips easily onto a jacket, vest, or chest pack, but also stores well inside a pocket. (\$19.95; FISHPONDUSA.COM) —J.B.S.

★ HOW WE TEST

To make the fly rod test an apples-to-apples evaluation, we limited the field to new 9-foot 5-weight rods. In order to make an accurate appraisal of their performance, we rigged them with identical reels, lines, leaders, and flies. When casting with small dries, we used 12-foot 5X leaders; we switched to 9-foot 4X leaders for

nymphs; and we fished streamers with 6-foot 2X leaders.

The rods were cast side-by-side under controlled conditions on rivers, streams, and lakes in and around Bozeman, Montana. They were also fished throughout the fall on various waters, including the Gallatin, Madison, and Yellowstone rivers. —J.B.S.

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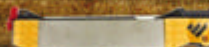
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HUNTING

A Colorado bowhunter stakes out a lightweight, collapsible Miss Purrr-fect decoy.

TURKEY DECOYS

THE NEW RUSE

Learn how to use the variety of new turkey fakes on the market. They're not all turkeys, and they're not all dekes. **BY JEFF JOHNSTON**

TIP

Replace the plastic stakes that come with many decoys with metal versions that won't break in compacted soil or fall over in the wind.

Fifteen years ago, turkey hunters had few decoy options that were both portable and realistic. Now, you don't have to stake your success on a decoy at all. Indeed, some innovative new plays go way beyond imitating strutters and hens.

STUMP THEM ▶

If you must bag a turkey at any cost, buy a Nature Blind (natureblinds.com). This is a Hollywood-scale prop that costs \$4,000, weighs 350 pounds, and looks like a home for Keebler elves. Hide in it, do jumping jacks in it, kill a tom from its clandestine gun ports, then emerge and go home—or not. You might rather live in this faux tree than face your spouse after buying it.



THE ULTIMATE FAN ▶▶▶

One of the slickest tactics since the shock call is the tail-fan technique. It's mobile, inexpensive, and should be used with caution.

Use a tail fan to hide yourself from a gobbler as you walk or crawl to get in range. You can make your own from an actual gobbler tail fan, but the MOJO Tail Chaser (mojooutdoors.com), which folds and fits in your vest, is the dude's snood.

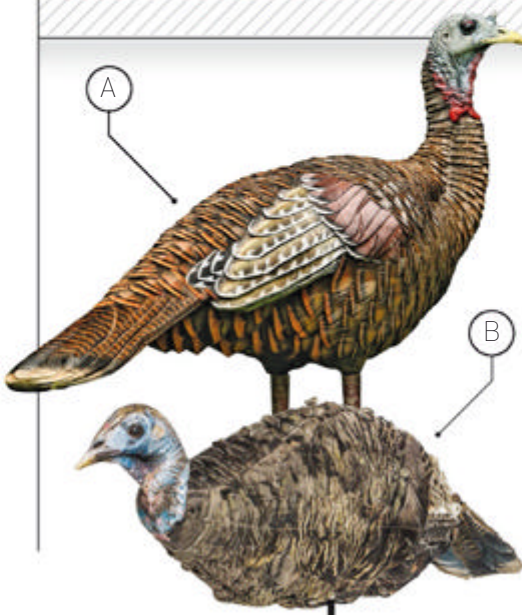


MILK THEIR ATTENTION

Some gobblers habitually hang up in the center of vast fields. To bag these birds, you must be creative.

In the 1984 slapstick movie *Top Secret*, spies infiltrate a Nazi stronghold using a cow suit to sneak across an open field. Replicate these hijinks with Montana Decoy's (montanadecoy.com) packable cow silhouette.

Scout where the gobbler struts, set Ol' Bessie up before dawn, and you'll have a bovine blind in the middle of the pasture. Or try the old "I'm-just-a-cow" technique, hiding behind the decoy as you walk to within shotgun range of the strutter. You'll feel ridiculous, but where cattle and turkeys cohabitate, this tactic can be utterly effective.



BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Professionally stuffed doppelgangers are neat, but they're also costly, fragile, and cumbersome. Conversely, early ultra-lightweight decoys were easy to carry—and also easy to lose in a breeze. Today, my top pick for the all-around best decoy is the Lifelike Collapsible Decoy (LCD) (A) from Avian-X (avian-x.com). So realistic, it'll make your heart lurch with surprise each time you glance at it, and it'll never flap and spin like a flyaway windsock. Or deploy the collapsible, packable, lifelike 3-D Miss Purr-fect (B) from Montana Decoy.

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CMMG MK47 MUTANT

WHERE THE AR-15 MEETS THE AK-47 **BY JOHN B. SNOW**

Ask 10 different shooters to define the ultimate general-purpose rifle and you'll likely get 10 different answers. But I'm willing to bet that none would describe a firearm like the new CMMG Mk 47. This gun is called the Mutant as a nod to its curious configuration. It is an AR-style rifle chambered in the classic AK-47 cartridge, the 7.62x39 Soviet.

A logical question to ask is, why do this? After all, we have other options for AR-15-sized uppers to fire .30-caliber rounds—the .300 Blackout and .30 Rem. AR to name two—and those rounds have designs that allow them to feed through standard AR magazines. The 7.62x39, in contrast, is inexorably linked with the iconic banana-shaped magazine that will not work in a standard AR lower.

This means a gunmaker needs to build a dedicated lower to make a 7.62x39 AR run, and that, in turn, jacks up the price.

Fortunately, cold, hard logic doesn't always apply in the world of gun manufacturing—how else to explain the enduring popularity of the 3½ inch shotgun? So the Missouri-based CMMG went ahead and built it anyway.

Easy to Tweak

I'm glad they did, because there's more to this rifle than initially meets the eye. First, consider the benefits of blending these two platforms. The fans of the AK are legion and dedicated. I include myself among their numbers. But despite the passion for them, AKs have some

limitations. When it comes to customization, there's nothing out there that can match the user-friendly modularity of the AR. Swapping out components and adding accessories like optics and lights is a snap. With AKs, all this is possible as well, it just isn't nearly as simple.

The Mutant has a rail extending from the rear of the receiver along the entire length of the 15-inch handguard, offering plenty of room to mount optics and sights. The handguard also has KeyMod attachment slots running along its length at the 3, 6, and 9 o'clock positions. This offers flexibility for customization without adding much weight.

The Mutant uses standard AR hardware elsewhere, too. The stock, trigger group, buffer tube, and gas system conform to AR mil-spec standards, meaning they can all be swapped out. The Mutant ships with a Magpul pistol grip and a Magpul six-position adjustable stock, both of which are top-notch components. All told, the ergonomics of the Mutant are excellent.

The rifle's simple, clean design makes it ready to perform any number of tasks. With a red-dot sight mounted, like the Aimpoint ACO shown above, it is configured for personal protection and Close Quarters Battle (CQB) duties. Put a 1X-4X or 1X-6X scope on it and you can take it to your next 3-Gun competition. Top it with a 2.5X-10X and you're ready to hunt. It is a general-purpose jack-of-all-trades.

The Round

One huge draw of the 7.62x39 is that it is economical. There are

PERFORMANCE					DESIGN				VALUE	TOTAL 84
Handling	Reliability	Accuracy	Meets Purpose	Versatility	Craftsmanship	Ergonomics	Durability	Aesthetics		
8	10	7	9	9	8	9	10	7	7	



For hunting, simply swap the 30-round magazine for a 5- or 10-rounder.

ample supplies of cheap, surplus ammo to shoot. There's no other .30-caliber round that compares in this respect. It is also an excellent personal protection round. One only needs to consider its history on the battlefield to grasp this.

As a hunting round, however, it isn't the first option that leaps to mind. For deer and other big game, it has never been given much consideration by the purists and pundits. Well, you might find this surprising, but ammo manufacturers are having a devil of a time keeping up with the demand for the 7.62x39 loaded with hunting bullets.

It makes sense. Sighted a couple of inches high at 100 yards, it'll be a couple of inches low at 200 and drop about 8 inches at 250. For deer hunting, this is more than adequate for 95 percent of the shots taken.

With this in mind, I shot the CMMG with two good hunting loads in addition to the cheapo surplus stuff. The rifle functioned perfectly even with the junky ammo, though the accuracy wasn't anything to get excited about.

Shooting the quality ammo,

► STATS	
Caliber	7.62x39
Capacity	30
Weight	7 lb. 3 oz.
Trigger Pull	6 lb. 5 oz.
Barrel Length	16.1 in.
Overall Length	36 ¾ in.
Price	\$1,650
Contact	cmmginc.com

the rifle's performance improved markedly. I used Hornady SSTs and Federal Fusion bullets, both weighing 123 grains. Overall five-shot accuracy averaged 1.557 inches, though the rifle preferred the Hornady ammo by a bit. Average group size with the SST was 1.459 inches, while the smallest group measured 0.798 inches.

About the only thing I'd change on this rifle if I were to use it for competition or hunting is the trigger. On my sample, it broke at a coarse 6 pounds 5 ounces. With a crisp aftermarket trigger set between 2½ and 3 pounds, the rifle would be good to go, whether you're hauling it to the range or into a deer blind.

NOTABLE FEATURES



✚ The magazine release is copied from the standard AK-47. The paddle in front of the trigger guard is ambidextrous; once you acquire the feel for rocking the magazine into place, it can be recharged quickly.



✚ The bolt carrier group (BCG) is based on a shortened AR-10 design. Compared to a standard AR-15 BCG, it has additional metal around the bolt face for better strength and durability.



TRIPLE THREAT

IS FEDERAL'S NEW SHOTSHELL AS EFFECTIVE UP CLOSE AS IT IS ON HUNG-UP TOMS? **BY ANDREW MCKEAN**

I have reached two conclusions after evaluating Federal's newest turkey load, an interesting three-pellet smorgasbord designed to smite gobblers both near and far. The first is: This load, called 3rd Degree, is a pretty good close-in turkey killer, a very good mid-range turkey killer, and an adequate long-range turkey killer. The second: You'd better make sure the turkey you are aiming at is standing apart from his pals (or girlfriends), because at 50 yards your lethal umbrella extends a good 2 feet on every side of your target.

NEAR AND FAR LETHALITY

Federal's 3rd Degree is designed to address a perceived shortcoming of the new wave of ultra-long-range turkey loads: stingy patterns inside 20 yards. At least theoretically, there's a strong basis for this position.

Shotshells that deliver a dense pattern at 50 yards and beyond should be shooting fist-sized patterns at closer ranges. That has been a convenient excuse for hunters who have missed gobblers at spitting distance. By loading a shotshell with three different sizes and densities of pellets, Federal says, its new load delivers forgivingly broad patterns at close ranges, but also killing patterns for those insidiously suspicious gobblers that hang up at 50 yards.

Shooting editor John B. Snow and I tested this claim by shooting patterning targets at both near (15 yards) and longish (50 yards) distances. We both fired six loads of 3-inch 3rd Degree at each target. I fired another six loads of what I consider to be a standard magnum turkey load, Winchester's Double X in 3-inch No. 5s. Snow's control shell was Federal's Mag-Shok Flitecontrol loaded with

No. 5s. I threw in a couple of shots of Winchester's Long Beard XR—one of the new generation of long-range loads—to see how the Federal shotshell stacks up against its peers. I shot a Remington 870 with a factory Extra-Full choke. Snow shot a Beretta A400 Xplor Unico with a factory Full choke.

CLOSE-IN PERFORMANCE

The first pellets to leave the 3rd Degree shell are No. 6 Flightstoppers. These nickel-plated lead pellets (20 percent of the payload) have a hemispheric ring that gives them an erratic flight. Designed to disperse, they give 3rd Degree a fairly wide pattern inside 20 yards.

Conclusion: They didn't disperse as much as I would have expected. The 3rd Degree delivers a 40 percent tighter pattern at 15 yards than the Double X and a 15 percent

more open pattern than Winchester's long-range Long Beard XR. At 15 yards, I give the dispersal advantage to the Double X.

LONG-RANGE PERFORMANCE

The 3rd Degree's second payload is Federal's copper-plated No. 5 lead pellets. I have consistently taken turkeys out to 40 yards with this load, and I have every reason to believe that the 40 percent of the 3rd Degree payload made up of these pellets will crush gobblers at those middle distances—say, from 20 to 40 yards. But our test wasn't in this happy middle ground. We also wanted to test the pattern at distance, in which the remaining 40 percent of the payload in 3rd Degree—No. 7 Heavyweight shot—should put enough pellets with killing energy in a gobbler's vitals. To test this, I shot six loads each of 3rd Degree and Double X at 50 yards.

Conclusion: 3rd Degree outperformed the Winchester load by 40 percent, placing an average of 10 pellets in the head and neck vitals compared to 6 pellets for the Double X. Interestingly, Winchester's Long Beard XR load put only 12 pellets in the vitals at 50 yards, making it only marginally more lethal than the Federal load at that range.

It's important to note the dispersion of

pellets from all shotshells at 50 yards. I used a 3-by-4-foot backing board for this distance test and counted the total number of pellet strikes—not only those in the head and neck of the patterning target.

Every shotshell, including the Winchester Long Beard, sprayed the downrange area with pellets, leading to my conclusion that because these are not precision payloads at

distance, hunters must take care not to inadvertently connect with bystanding turkeys. The 3rd Degree load printed an average of 220 pellets on the 12-square-foot target, compared to 198 pellets from the Double X. Long Beard delivered an average of 317 pellets at 50 yards. Snow counted an average of 173 pellets from 3rd Degree, compared to 171 from the Federal Mag-Shok load.

		SHOTSHELL			
DISTANCE		FED. 3RD DEGREE	WIN. DOUBLE X	FED. MAG-SHOK	WIN. LONGBEARD
	15 YARDS AVERAGE SIZE OF PATTERN	11"	12.6"	9"	7.3"
	50 YARDS AVERAGE PELLETS IN HEAD/NECK	9	6	6	12
	TOTAL PELLETS COUNTED AT 50 YARDS*	196	198	171	317

*Because of different-size backing boards, these totals are not statistically significant.

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THE OUTDOOR LIFE HOW-TO SPECIAL

MAKING IT

HOW TO EARN A LIVING IN THE OUTDOORS,

PLUS, 22 DIY PROJECTS THAT WILL SAVE

YOU BOATLOADS OF CASH



ANDREW HETHERINGTON

E

VERY OUTDOORSMAN dreams of turning his passion for hunting and fishing into some sort of a living. Maybe as a professional fisherman or a hunting outfitter. Or maybe as a wildlife photographer or the host of a television hunting show. It's a universal truth among outdoorsmen that our dream of making a living in

the outdoors generally comes into sharpest focus just as we're paying for a new gun, or a dozen arrows, or a tub of bait. It doesn't have to be just a dream, though. We tracked down a half dozen people who've successfully converted their avocation into their vocation, and asked them what it takes to make a living doing what they love.

And if making money in the outdoors isn't in the cards for you, our DIY projects and gear hacks will help you save a few bucks.





THE NEW-MEDIA STAR

MARK KENYON

HILLSDALE, MICHIGAN

LAST SEASON, Mark Kenyon got a shot at Jawbreaker. That's the name he'd given a 10-point buck after it first appeared on his trail cams prior to the 2013 season. Kenyon had written about the deer on his blog, talked about him on podcasts, and recorded videos of his hunts for the buck. Then, on the evening of October 16, 2014, Jawbreaker strolled beneath Kenyon's stand. The hunter found the buck in his camera, drew his bow, and shot. However, he immediately suspected his arrow had hit too far back. In the hunt video, Kenyon looks into the camera with wide eyes and whispers, "Please, Lord, let him go down," but he never recovered the deer. Nonetheless, he shared the whole story, in detail, with an audience of thousands.

Kenyon's 2014 deer season has a lot in common with his burgeoning career in outdoor media—in particular, the adversity, perseverance, and heartfelt honesty. Kenyon runs *Wired to Hunt*, a whitetail-focused website and brand he started in 2008 as an undergrad at Michigan State University. After earning a degree in business marketing, he landed a job at Google. Kenyon spent his days working for the tech company and his nights and weekends working on *Wired to Hunt*. "I wanted to immerse myself in it," Kenyon says. "Some nights I would work on my site until 3 a.m."

The site's traffic grew steadily at first, but by 2013, it began to plateau. Not wanting to give up his dream, he quit his job.

"I remember getting in my truck after I quit and thinking, *Wow, I just quit Google. This is crazy,*" he says.

After landing a handful of strong sponsors, *Wired to Hunt* now accounts for about 60 percent of Kenyon's annual income of approximately \$50,000. He also runs social media for the National Deer Alliance, and does some freelance writing (see p. 57). Kenyon is the first to admit he's no expert hunter, but that's what makes him unique in this era of hunting "celebrities."

"The most important thing I can do is maintain the trust my audience has in me," Kenyon says. "If I lose that, I'm done."

I REMEMBER GETTING IN MY TRUCK AFTER I QUIT AND THINKING, WOW, I JUST QUIT GOOGLE. THIS IS CRAZY.



PHOTOGRAPH BY **ANDREW HETHERINGTON**

SHOOTING**HUNTING**
FREE FOOD-PLOT SEED

By Tony Hansen

► The National Wild Turkey Federation's Conservation Seed Program takes seed from dealers that can no longer be sold commercially (usually because it's outdated) and offers it to NWTF chapters and their members for just the cost of shipping. That means a 50-pound bag will run roughly \$5. Typically, only grains like corn, milo, and wheat are available—no turnips, clover, or rape—and it's likely to be a year old, but that should have minimal impact on germination rates. If you need to plant 10 percent more than normal, so be it—it's free! The seed can only be used for wildlife purposes (no harvesting), and you have to put it in the ground, but it's treated corn (usually RoundUp Ready), so it shouldn't be used as bait anyway.

To keep costs manageable, the program requires at least a half-semi load be delivered to one location. If your local chapter doesn't partake, odds are one within reasonable driving distance does, so just call around. The seed does tend to go fast, so get your name on the list sooner rather than later.

**[NEW TECH] DOPE YOUR SHOT ON THE CHEAP**

There are more than 100 ballistics apps for iPhone and Android operating systems that give shooters long-range solutions for real-time conditions. They're all slightly different, but so are the riflemen who use them. Hunters need an intuitive app for shots of 300 to perhaps 600 yards, while target shooters have the luxury of feeding complex programs precise data, since their targets won't run off. The following apps offer the best value.

No. 1 for Hunters: The free Strellok app was the first to pop up on my Android-based phone because it's been downloaded more than any other. (On iPhone, it is called iStrellok and costs \$4.99.) It offers a good balance of precise data and user-friendly displays. Enter load and

environmental data to learn your click adjustments, MOA, mil, and inch calculations in table form. Next, choose your specific scope reticle from a comprehensive menu and see it overlaid on the target, complete with subtension values. Press a button to e-mail a printable range card.

Honorable Mention: The \$.99 Hunter Joe app is easy to use and functional, but it doesn't allow for ballistic reticles, nor is load data preset. (You should enter your load data anyway, as ammo seldom achieves company-listed velocities.) Like other apps, Hunter Joe uses location weather data, and it shows where to hold for a deer's vitals at any range.

No. 1 for Shooters: The Strellok Plus app for \$5.45 adds subtension values

across all magnifications, making it a bargain choice for hunters and shooters. But if you don't mind a home screen that looks like the heads-up display of an F-18's cockpit, the free Sniper Calc app for Android is powerful and, with practice, very fast. Using its reticle-view screen, fine-tune for wind and slope to quickly determine the hold for a given range. Reticle choices include various versions of mil dots.

Honorable Mentions: While apps like iSnipe, Knight Armament Bullet Flight, Mil-Dot Ballistics, and Shooter are all-encompassing, they cost between \$9 and \$29. However, for \$3.99, Shot Muse for iPhone is especially valuable for competitive shooters; it keeps a log of targets and shot strings.

—Jeff Johnston

HUNTING **UMBRELLA DUCK BLIND** BY TOM CARPENTER

Build this low-cost overhead waterfowl blind for less than \$20. First, obtain a 4-to-8-foot extension pole (the kind used for paint rollers). Next, recruit an old umbrella from around the house, or buy a cheapie. Spray-paint the open umbrella fabric to match the surroundings you'll be hunting in: greens for early-season tules or reeds, tans and browns for late-season cattails. Tightly duct-tape the umbrella shaft to the end of the pole, but leave the mechanism uncovered. In the field, extend the secondary pole, insert the pole into the soft marsh substrate, and open the umbrella to hide yourself from prying duck eyes.



SHOOTING

LOW-COST ZERO

By Wayne Van Zwoll

► It's irresponsible to hunt with a rifle that you haven't sighted-in, but you needn't burn through a box of ammo to zero your gun.

[STEP 1] To begin, bore-sight it. Using sandbags or a shooting rest to support the rifle, remove the bolt or open the dropping-block action. Looking through the bore, align it with a rock on a distant hillside. Next, adjust the scope's windage and elevation until the reticle settles onto yon rock.

[STEP 2] Scrounge as big a cardboard box as you can find and tape a quarter of a sheet of printer paper in the center. Set the box 35 yards from your rest.

[STEP 3] Steady the rifle and fire one round. The bullet should drill the paper target, or at least hit somewhere on the box.

[STEP 4] If you can secure the rifle so the sight remains on the target, use the scope's adjustments to move the center of the reticle onto the bullet hole. Otherwise, count clicks as you turn those dials. At 35 yards, you need 12 clicks of quarter-minute dials to shift impact one inch. Fire another shot at 35 yards to check. After adjusting, if necessary, move the box to 100 yards.

With most modern hunting loads, a center hit at 35 yards means a near-center hit at 100. But to extend point-blank range, you want a 200-yard zero. After the first shot at 100, adjust so the next shot hits 2½ inches high. Here you need four clicks to shift impact an inch.

[STEP 5] Move the box to 200 yards, fire, and adjust to center. Confirm with a three-shot group and you're done. Given careful bore-sighting, you'll have used as few as seven rounds—plus a rock and a box.



[DIY PROJECT]

DEER-ANTLER SLINGSHOT

IF THERE'S A BETTER WAY TO TEACH A KID HOW TO HUNT THAN TO HAND HER A SLINGSHOT, WE'VE YET TO FIND IT. BETTER STILL, MAKE A SLINGSHOT WITH YOUR FUTURE HUNTER. BY FRANK MINITER

GEAR **STUD YOUR BOOTS** BY PETER B. MATHIESEN

Want to improve your footing on the river, but don't want to drop \$200 on wading boots? An old pair of light hikers, a couple of dollars, and a trip to the hardware store can keep you upright. Look for self-tapping ¼-inch hex-head sheet-metal screws no longer than ½ inch long. Plan on 16 to 20 screws per boot, but buy extras, as you'll lose a few over the course of the season. Create an even pattern, keeping in mind that the balls and heels of your feet make the most contact with rocks. Because the screws are self-tapping, you should be able to just screw them into the soles without predrilling, but be careful not to strip them.

LUKE NILSSON (BULLETS)



THE OUTDOOR WRITER

RON SPOMER

BOISE, IDAHO

**[STEP ONE]**

A forked whitetail antler is the right size for small hands. Size up to a muley shed for larger hands. Cut off the tine tips and file grooves near the ends.

**[STEP TWO]**

For the bands, I like TheraBand Gold. Double them to increase the poundage for squirrel-thumping velocity. Attach them with smaller strips of the TheraBand. Wrap a strip six times around the slingshot band where you made each groove. Place a doubled-over piece of thin string vertically (up the tine) over the wrappings and make two more wraps. Push the end of the TheraBand strip through the string loop and use the string to pull the end under the last two wrappings (making a nail knot). Trim the ends.

[STEP THREE]

Use the same method to attach the band ends to the pouch, which you can cut out of leather or canvas. Be sure to make the bands the same length.

[STEP FOUR]

Use 150-grit sandpaper to remove burrs. File finger grooves into the handle. Apply a tung oil finish.



JUSTIN APPENZELLER (SCREWS)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOEL KIMMEL

WHY DO YOU WANT to be a game warden?" the college adviser asked me. "Because I love to hunt and fish." "While everyone else is hunting, you'll be watching them," he replied. "And the paperwork? Forms, court appearances. You'll be indoors a lot."

So I didn't go to school to become a game warden. I did something worse. I became an outdoor writer. That means I write *about* the outdoors, not *in* the outdoors. Remember that last term paper you wrote, sitting indoors, staring at a blank computer screen until blood leaked out of your ears? Imagine doing that 364 days a year. Yeah, I allow myself Christmas Day off.

I started by writing five hunting stories for five of my favorite magazines and sending them off, unsolicited. All five sold. The next five, not so much. But I persevered and learned the trick to sales: Present an editor with accurate, honest information written cleanly and clearly—on time, every time. The less editing he has to do, the more likely he'll buy your work again. A poetic turn of phrase is nice but not essential.

Each published article led to more assignments. I spent fewer hours hunting and fishing and lost my suntan. But when I did go afield, it was often to exotic places and usually at a discount while using other people's equipment. This was good and bad. Imagine having to get used to a new gun, scope, binocular, load, and trajectory the day you start a deer hunt. Every time. Imagine having to interrupt your hunt to snap photos, shoot video, and take notes. Imagine flight delays, lost luggage, jet lag, strange camps, and snoring roommates while your wife is back home seething because she thinks you're

on vacation. The only occupation with a higher divorce rate is Hollywood star, but someone has to do it.

SHIFTING TIDES

Pay rates vary from dismal to fair. My first five articles in 1976 brought between \$75 and \$500 a piece. Today, magazines pay \$200 to \$2,000—but rarely the latter. Blog posts fetch \$50 to \$350. Writers are expected to provide top-quality photos with their words, often for no additional compensation. Videos are beginning to replace written stories, and that's another scattered, flooded market.

Then there are the "personalities" on TV and the internet. Suddenly country singers, wrestling champs, and beauty queens are experts in bullets, ballistics, and broadheads. Career outdoor writers—men and women who hunt, research, test, interview, and report in detail—are going the way of the television repairman.

I've enjoyed a wonderful career that has enabled me to hunt around the world with the best gear, guides, trackers, and hunters. Given the worldwide decline in wild places, I wouldn't recommend young people set their sights on being an outdoor writer now. It's a hectic and stressful job demanding dedication, discipline, perseverance, and, these days, a good TV persona. But if you think you've got what it takes, try it. Hunters, hunting, and the hunted need talented voices to promote and defend them.



↑
RON'S MOST
RECENT
PIECE IN OL





[GUN CARE] REPAIR A BUSTED STOCK

A broken rifle stock needn't mean the end of the gun. The repair may show, but the stock can still be strong. Sometimes the repairs even add character.

[1] Take the gun apart so the stock is free and clear. Simply gluing the stock together will not produce a strong enough repair. Brass stock repair pins from Brownells reinforce the stock and prevent it from splitting again. The idea is to pin the broken area as you glue it; the brass pins provide structural strength along the damaged area. The pins must be placed in solid sections of the stock.

[2] Choose a drill bit that's a few thousandths of an inch smaller than the pin. The pin should fit

snugly, but if the hole is too small, it will be difficult to drive the soft brass pin into place. As you drill the holes, hold the broken pieces together so they're correctly aligned. If you're going to drill all the way through, as opposed to making blind holes, make sure the drill runs true and exits in the desired location on the opposite side of the stock.

[3] For repairs on wood stocks, I like Brownells Acraglas Gel stock bedding compound. This is an epoxy that forms a very strong bond, and it can be dyed to match the finish on the stock. Coat both pieces with the gel. If the stock is not completely broken, carefully pry open the split and fill it with the gel. Force

it into any cracks. You want all of the broken surfaces to be well coated with the glue. Note that the stock repair pins have grooves in them, which will hold the bedding compound and help form a tight bond with the stock. Coat the pins with gel and carefully tap them into place. Make sure the stock pieces stay tightly together as the pins are inserted and that there is no gap between the pieces.

[4] Clamp the broken pieces together. Several tight wraps with electrician's tape works well. Surgical tubing is good for clamping uneven surfaces. Vises and C-clamps provide ample power but must be padded to prevent damage to the stock.

Clean up any excess gel, then let it set for at least two days.

[5] After removing the clamps or tape, clip the pins close to the stock. Use a file to bring them flush and to remove any excess glue. When you get close to the stock surface, switch to sandpaper in a sanding block. With a small repair, if you work carefully, you can avoid damaging the finish on the stock. For a large or extensive repair, it's better to sand down to the bare wood. This allows for the best fit with the pins and glue line, resulting in the least noticeable repair. You can try to match the stain and stock finish, but you're better off stripping and refinishing the entire stock. —*Bryce Towsley*



HUNTING FIND A FIELD DOG AT THE POUND

By Brad Fitzpatrick

► If you're in the market for a new hunting companion, you might consider a trip to the local shelter. You could find a diamond in the rough, as a friend of mine did—a beagle that became one of the best hunting dogs he ever owned. The key to success is examining each dog to determine which will work best for you.

Breed: Pound hounds don't come with a pedigree, but you should do your best to determine the breed of any dog you're considering. Some dogs might have abilities that are outside the breed's intended purpose, but selecting a dog with the most suitable background is a step in the right direction.

Temperament: Dr. Mark Hayes of the Mount Orab (Ohio) Veterinary Clinic suggests that all shelter dogs be examined for aggressive behavior toward people or other animals before they're considered for adoption. A dog with a good temperament has a better chance of responding to training. A field dog needs to

learn basic obedience commands, and this requires a willing temperament.

Health Issues: "Be sure to check a dog for any sign of infectious disease before adopting," says Hayes. A runny nose, cough, or fever can spread to other pets. Some dogs have limiting physical ailments, and older dogs will likely not be able to work as long as younger ones.

Instinct: This factor is difficult to evaluate at the shelter, but it is the most influential in determining whether the dog will hunt. The good news is that if you select a dog that has hunting instinct, you'll spend more time refining that instinct and less time training. Spending time in the field helps, especially with other well-trained dogs. My friend's beagle fell in with a group of trained hounds and quickly learned to hunt with no encouragement from her owner. A dog with the right instincts will be self-motivated to find game.

[DIY PROJECT]

PVC CHUM TUBE

ATTRACT MORE FISH WITH THIS DURABLE TUBE THAT COSTS LESS THAN \$10 TO MAKE
BY CAPT. DAVE LEAR



[STEP ONE]

Use sandpaper to rough up the outer ends of the PVC pipe and inside the socket cap and hub collars.

[STEP TWO]

Apply a liberal amount of PVC cement around one of the scored ends and seat the pipe into the socket cap. Repeat on the other end with the hub.



[STEP THREE]

Drill a hole through the center of the FPT cap. Insert the eyebolt, add the washer and lock nut, and tighten.

[STEP FOUR]

Tie on a loop of cord with a carabiner or snap hook for quick attachment to a boat cleat or stern lift.



[STEP FIVE]

Drill multiple holes through the barrel of the PVC pipe. A $1\frac{9}{64}$ -inch bit will allow larger chum particles to leach out at a reasonable pace.



WHAT YOU NEED

10 to 12 inches of
2-inch Schedule 40
PVC pipe
PVC cement
1 2-inch PVC socket
cap

1 2-inch PVC hub
with threaded
male reducer
1 2-inch PVC
threaded FPT cap
 $1\frac{3}{8}$ x 1-inch
stainless-steel

eyebolt with
washer and nylon
lock nut
20 inches of $\frac{1}{4}$ -
inch nylon cord
1 carabiner or
snap hook



THE GUN-STORE CLERK

**SAM
MOREHOUSE**
GLASGOW, MONTANA

I WORK IN MY family's sporting-goods store. The worst thing about working with my dad is that we can't hunt or fish together except on Sundays, when the store is closed. The other downside is that we're stuck working when everybody else is out hunting or fishing.

Even though we're in a rural area, we feel the competition from the big-box stores and the internet. We have to be competitive on price because anybody can get on their phone and see what an item sells for in Billings or online. And we try to be competitive with inventory, but it's been tough ever since the gun boom in 2008. We do a lot of special ordering, but sometimes it's years before we get the product in hand. We just got in some ammo that was ordered in 2012.

You're not going to get rich at this job. It's an hourly wage and we don't make commissions on sales. I make better than minimum wage, and I get health insurance and vacation time, but the best perk is the discount on gear—we pay just a little over cost.

However, I really like guns, so any disposable income I have goes right back into the stuff we sell. But I get to see new products before anyone else. I think the fact that I'm in the field using new gear makes me a more knowledgeable salesman. That's something the big-box stores don't have.





HUNTING

HOMEMADE COVER SCENT

By Bob Humphrey

► The key to the effectiveness of a cover scent is how well it matches the aromas of the area you hunt. Commercial scents work fine, but they're not always regionally accurate. However, you can make your own scent for next to nothing and tailor it to your hunting grounds.

[STEP 1] Collect vegetation from your home woods and put it in a pot of water. Aromatic plants make the best cover scents because they'll infuse more oils and resin into the solution when cooked. This usually means evergreens like balsam fir, spruce, pine, and cedar, though you can use deciduous leaves or forbs like sassafras, sage, or goldenrod. If there aren't any strongly aromatic plants around, gather duff from the forest floor, and don't be afraid to throw in a little loose soil. You can also use fruits and nuts and make a solution that works as both a cover and an attractant.

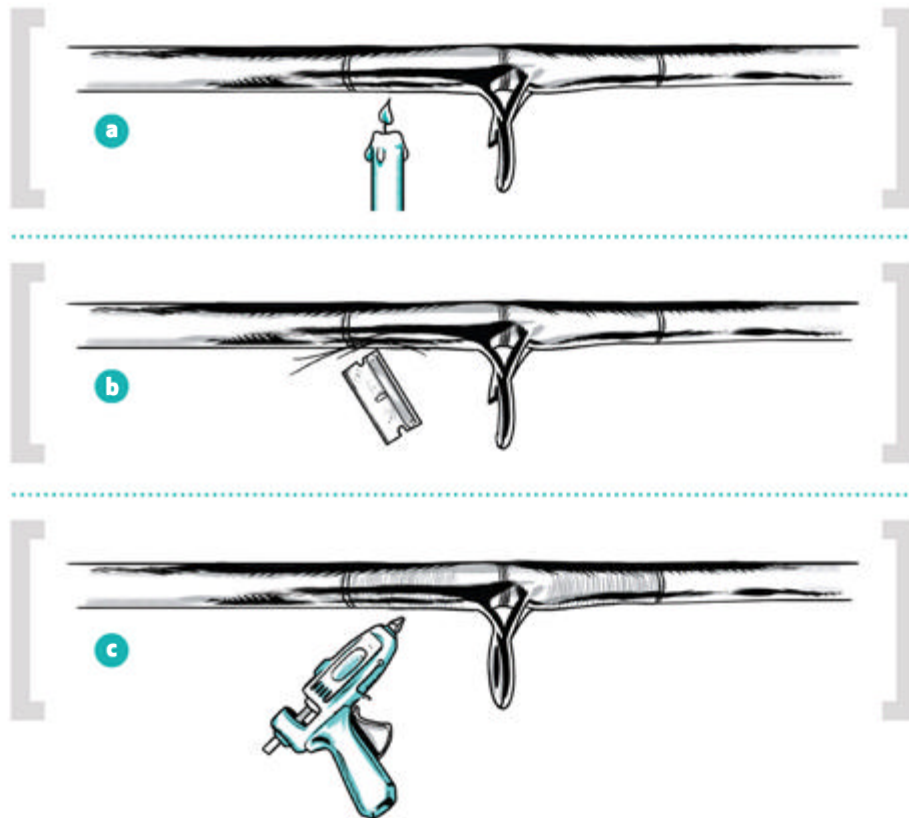
[STEP 2] Bring it to a boil and let it simmer for 20 to 30 minutes. The longer you boil it, the more concentrated your broth will be; however, boiling for too long might vaporize some of the aroma you're trying to capture. It's best to use as little water as possible.

[STEP 3] Strain the solution through cheesecloth, a piece of game bag, or an old T-shirt to remove any particulates that might clog your applicator. Once it has cooled, pour into a clean spray bottle. If you use scent-eliminating spray, save your empties for this purpose and relabel them.

[DIY PROJECT]

THREE QUICK ROD FIXES

IT'S A SHAME TO DITCH A FISHING ROD THAT JUST NEEDS A LITTLE TLC. WHY THROW AWAY A TRUSTED OLD FRIEND THAT FLAT-OUT CATCHES FISH—AND SPEND MONEY TO REPLACE IT—WHEN BASIC REPAIRS ARE THIS EASY? BY TOM CARPENTER



1 REPLACE A GUIDE

Use a candle to heat the epoxy around the guide's factory wrappings and break the seal **(a)**. Cut off the old wrappings with a razor blade, cutting on the rod guide's feet to avoid marring the blank **(b)**. Clean the area well with acetone or isopropyl alcohol and let dry. Place and position the new rod guide. Using rod-guide thread or heavy-duty nylon sewing thread, wrap the new rod guide on. Seal the wrapping with a coat of clear epoxy glue or hot glue around all threading **(c)**.



2 RESTORE A TIP

Clip off the jagged end to make a clean break. Sand down the end so the new tip will just fit. Put a few drops of hot glue into the ferrule of the new tip. Slide it onto the broken rod. Wipe off excess glue, but leave a small seal between the tip and the rod. Hold the tip in place until the glue cools and sets a bit. Sand off any excess globules after drying.



3

REPAIR A GRIP

Detach the broken end and remove all cracked or crushed material **(a)**. Trim a new piece of cork to the correct size. Drill out a hole in each piece of cork **(b)**. Cut a wood dowel to the proper size and length. Coat the dowel with epoxy or hot glue and insert it into the rod cork; slide the new cork piece over the other end **(c)**. Inject glue into the junction to seal and connect the pieces; wipe off any excess. If the seam is sloppy, make a cork paste (sanded cork combined with wood glue) and use it to refurbish the grip.



THE OUTFITTER

LAYNE WILCOX

TWIN BRIDGES, MONTANA

For the better part of three decades, Layne Wilcox has guided hunters into the mountains of western Montana in search of elk and mule deer. He got his start right after high school, working for an outfitter in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Nine years ago, he and his wife, Candy, jumped at the chance to buy the outfit he was working for at the time. Today they operate Advantage Backcountry Outfitters in the Beaverhead National Forest.

OL: How do you start an outfitting business?

LW: We got really lucky. In Montana, you have to buy out another outfitter in order to get on Forest Service land, which is where most of the backcountry camps are. We saw the stars align when my boss retired, and we got financing. The toughest thing is being the new guy on the block and lining up customers without any references. But if you can guide a hunter to a good bull, he'll tell 5 or 10 buddies, and that's how you get going.

OL: What are your biggest expenses?

LW: Most of it's paying the cooks and guides, plus caring for and feeding stock. We don't have winter range here, so we have to feed them winter hay, which is expensive. One year it might be \$80 a ton and the next year it's \$180 a ton. But I lease them to another lodge in the summer, and that pays for their feed all winter. I do all my own farrier work and shoeing. If I didn't, that's \$300 to \$400 per head per year, and we're working with 25 head. In terms of vet costs, you have to worm them several times a year, plus there are the vaccinations. Luckily my wife sells vet supplies, so we get everything at a discount. In a good year, we'll make \$120,000 or so.

OL: How do you remain successful?

LW: We just try to run a top-notch camp. We hire cooks who are good at cooking. All our stock is well broke and great to ride. My group of guides is great. They've been with me for many years, and they like where I hunt. We have elk there, so they're able to get their hunters on some critters. One of the toughest things in my business is finding good help.

OL: What do you like most and least about outfitting?

LW: I like guiding people who have never killed an elk, especially young kids. What we offer is a bucket-list hunt for a lot of people. This year, we'll have two ladies in their 60s. It's been their dream to go on an elk hunt, so that'll be a ball.

The biggest frustration is clients whose expectations are out of whack or who show up out of shape. Hunters are getting bigger, and I hate to say it but people just don't want to work for things anymore. You might find an elk for a guy, but it's going to be a tough 2-mile hike to get within range, and he decides he doesn't want to do it. It's heartbreaking for a guide to finally find an animal and have the hunter tell you that. People just want it easy, and I think that's because TV shows make it look that way.

OL: Is outfitting a good way to make a living?

LW: It is if you like to work hard. We work a minimum of 18 hours a day during the season. Everyone's up around 4 a.m., gone from camp by 6, and we don't get back until 8 at night. Then you eat dinner, take care of the stock, feed them, go to bed, and do it all over again.





THE APPAREL MAKER

KIRSTIE PIKE

GUNNISON, COLORADO

ALTHOUGH SHE never received any formal business or apparel design training, that didn't stop Kirstie Pike from starting one of the first companies to produce technical hunting clothing designed exclusively for women. A nurse by trade, Pike is also a diehard hunter. A decade ago, she walked into a big-box outdoors store to pick up gear before archery season—and walked out frustrated.

"There was literally nothing there for women except cotton capri pants and tight baby-doll T-shirts," recalls Pike, who had resorted to wearing running clothes on her hunts.

Male hunters had plenty of quality hunting gear to choose from, and there was no shortage of technical apparel for female hikers, bikers, runners, and skiers. But the female hunter was left wanting. Pike decided to target that untapped market and founded Prois in 2006.

GREAT STRIDES

Pike started by sketching her ideas for some of the gear missing from the women's hunting market—comfortable, well-fitting outerwear. Next, she tracked down a pattern maker in Colorado to help develop the designs. That led her to a cut-and-sew guy in California, who transformed the patterns into real-life prototypes. Prois currently employs eight people (though Pike expects to hire additional employees soon) and has a pro staff of more than 50 members—all of them women.

Pike started Prois out of pocket, but after a

few years of rapid expansion, she found herself struggling to meet increasing demand with limited resources. After more than a year of talks with potential investors, her current backers turned up out of the blue.

"They came to us for no other reason than that they liked the company and what it stood for," says Pike.

Production ramped up again and Prois saw a 30 percent increase in growth from 2013 to 2014. It's still a small business, but it's also a powerhouse in its space.

SECRET TO SUCCESS

Apart from the inherent rewards of providing quality products to an underserved demographic, Pike says her company's success hinges on customer service.

"Women are just different customers," Pike says. "When you can outfit a woman in hunting gear that she's never been able to get, and she feels good and looks good, and she's comfortable—women love that. And the high-end brand becomes part of her identity as a hunter."

Prois aims to establish itself as the go-to brand for female hunters, no matter their pursuit. It already has product lines for big-game, safari, and upland hunting, and Pike anticipates adding waterfowl options in the future.

"Expanding our lines has definitely expanded our sales," she says. "Not every woman needs camo. Being able to speak to women and honor their specialty is how you build your sales."

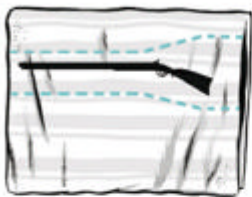
**[DIY PROJECT]**WOOL
BLANKET
GUN CASE

EMBRACE YOUR INNER MOUNTAIN MAN AND CRAFT YOUR NEXT RIFLE CASE FROM AN OLD WOOL BLANKET
BY ARAM VON BENEDIKT

**WHAT YOU NEED**

- Wool blanket
- T-pins
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Heavy nylon thread
- Sewing machine or semi-large sewing needle
- Embroidery thread
- Leather string





[STEP ONE]

Make sure your blanket is at least 12 inches longer than the gun you'll store in it. Lay your rifle on the blanket and fold the blanket over it so that it covers the gun completely, plus at least 2 inches extra. Pin the case into shape with T-pins. Use a pencil to draw an outline, staying 2 inches away

from the firearm. Don't follow the gun's contours too closely; you'll want the gun to slide in and out with ease.

Across the muzzle end, mark a half-inch seam allowance instead of 2 inches. At the butt end, extend the case 10 to 12 inches to create a flap that will fold over the butt of the rifle.

[STEP TWO]

Slide the rifle out and, using a sharp pair of scissors, follow your pencil lines to cleanly cut out the pinned-together case.

[STEP THREE]

Sew your case with heavy nylon thread. If you use a sewing machine,

make sure that the seam is heavily pinned or the top layer will crawl along ahead of the sewing foot. If you sew your case by hand, use a semi-large needle to make small stitches no more than ¼ inch long. Reinforce both ends of your seam with extra stitching. It should go without saying, but don't sew the butt end shut.



[STEP FOUR]

You can either leave the rough edge out or turn the case inside out for a more finished look. Bind the edges of the mouth with heavy embroidery thread so they don't fray.

[STEP FIVE]

Sew on a closure tie. I like a semi-soft leather string about ¼ inch wide. Use an awl to poke four holes, each separated by ¼ inch, in one side of your case. They should be 4 inches from the open end of the case and parallel with the opening. Make the holes just big enough to thread your leather string through in a running stitch, leaving a foot or two on each side of the stitching.



FISHING **PORK-RIND TRAILERS** BY TOM CARPENTER

You can add fish-attracting motion to spoons, jigs, and other lures with a pork-rind trailer. But you'll catch more fish with homemade pork rinds that add an irresistible scent and salty taste to your offering.

Buy salt pork, also known as fatback, from your butcher. Trim off the excess fat. Fry the fatback in a hot pan, fat-side down, for 10 seconds. Add a cup of water, heat quickly, then lower the heat and simmer for 5 minutes. This renders the fat and makes the skin pliable and easier to cut. Keep the fatback flat during simmering. After cooling, use sharp scissors to cut the rind into your desired lure shapes. Color rinds as you would Easter eggs, in a solution of food coloring, one tablespoon of vinegar, and enough hot water to just cover the rind. Store your rinds in a very salty brine (use kosher salt).





THE HEAD-BOAT MATE

**JODI
WAIBEL**

NORTH BRANFORD, CT

EVEN GRIZZLED charter-boat captains will agree that the most critical—and thankless—job on any fishing boat belongs to the mate. Long hours, strenuous daily routines, low pay, and zero recognition? Jodi Waibel, a mate aboard the *Black Hawk* out of Niantic, wouldn't have it any other way.

OL: What's your typical day like?

JW: I'm usually up at 4 a.m. and at the boat an hour before our first trip at 6. I prep bait, rig up, greet customers, and sometimes sell trip tickets, hats, and T-shirts. It takes us 45 minutes to an hour to get to where we'll fish. When we're fishing, I untangle lines and net fish. On the way in, I cut and bag fillets. Once we're back in, I clean the boat and stow gear for the next trip. Some days during the peak of the season, we run three trips a day. During the summer months I sometimes work seven days a week, but that's by choice.

OL: What's the most and the least you've made on a trip?

JW: The most was probably \$300. The least was \$12.

OL: This sounds like a tough way to make a living.

JW: Maybe, but I truly love my job. I've been fishing since I was three years old—my dad would take me with him all the time. I went to school to learn marine mechanics. I also learned that I'm not one to sit behind a desk. I got to the point where I wanted to do what I most enjoyed doing, and this is it.



[DIY PROJECT]

MAKE AN AX HANDLE

DONE RIGHT, IT WILL BE TOUGHER, LAST LONGER, AND FIT YOU BETTER THAN ANY STORE-BOUGHT HAFT
BY ARAM VON BENEDIKT



[STEP ONE]

Find a chunk of aged wood that is straight-grained and free of knots. The growth rings must be oriented so they'll run parallel to the flat side of the finished handle. Hickory is good; Osage orange is best. With a hatchet or saw, reduce the wood to a plank roughly 1½x4x32 inches.

[STEP TWO]

Any ax handle that feels good in your hands will work as a pattern. Lay it on top of your plank and trace the outline, staying a shade wide. Use a farrier rasp to trim away everything outside the lines.

[STEP THREE]

Clamp the handle in a vise, head-up. Place the ax head on top of the handle end. Make sure it's oriented perfectly, then trace the inside of the eye head onto the top of the handle end. Remove the head. Draw another line ⅛ inch outside the traced line. Using your farrier rasp, reduce the wood to the outside line, and far enough down the handle to accommodate the depth of the head. Using the fine-cut side of the rasp, reduce the top until the eye of the ax just barely starts over it. Tap it onto the handle until it stops, then remove it. Remove wood where you see marks indicating where the head

stopped. Repeat the process until the head fits onto the handle with ¼ inch extending above the top.

[STEP FOUR]

Set the head aside and start shaping the handle. Remove wood until it feels perfect in your hands. Sand it well, starting with 80-grit and working up to 320-grit. Don't sand the wood that fits inside the head. Spray the handle with polyurethane and let dry



[STEP FIVE]

Use a hacksaw to make a 2-inch-deep cut lengthwise into the top of the handle. Fashion an Osage wedge the same width and depth as your cut, and ¾ inch thick at the top. Apply a thin layer of 30-minute epoxy inside the eye and on the wood that goes into the head. Slide them together, tapping the head firmly onto the handle. Apply epoxy to both sides of your wedge and pound it into the cut in the handle. It's okay if the wedge splits. Seat it as deeply as you can.

[STEP SIX]

Clean up excess epoxy. After the epoxy has cured, cut the top of the handle and wedge to about ⅛ inch above the head. Clean up the rough edges with sandpaper and give it a blast of polyurethane.

WHAT YOU NEED

Chunk of wood
Hatchet
Pattern handle
Vise

Pencil
Farrier rasp
Mallet
Sandpaper

Polyurethane
Hacksaw
30-minute epoxy

GEAR

GEAR

PATCH A BOW TARGET

By Toby Walrath



[STEP 1] Wrap the target with self-adhesive drywall joint tape. Make sure it's wrapped tightly, and secure the edges with duct tape, but leave an opening on one side to insert the nozzle of a can of foam sealant.

[STEP 2] Fill the hole with the sealant (use the kind made for filling small gaps and cracks; the kind designed for large cracks is not adequate for stopping arrows) by covering the inside edges and slowly letting the foam expand.



[STEP 3] Once the target is filled, add another wrap of the mesh tape to completely enclose the repaired area. The foam should continue to push out through the mesh tape. Remove excess by gently scraping with a piece of cardboard. Let dry for 24 hours.



[STEP 4] Use a wood rasp to shape the material to resemble the original target.

[STEP 5] Coat with spray paint to make the target look almost as good as new.

**[QUICK FIX]** REVIVE YOUR DOWN JACKET

Time is not on your side when it comes to the fragile exterior of your synthetic- or feather-filled vest or shell. Eventually, an encounter with a barbed-wire fence or the tip of a knife being returned to its sheath will slice an opening in the nylon. The best repair for such a tear is simple duct tape. (I've found Gorilla-brand tape to be the stickiest and most waterproof of the bunch.) But to save us from looking like a frat boy wearing his brother's hand-me-down puffy, we're going to put the tape on the inside so it won't curl up and fall off in a week.

Tear off a piece of tape larger than the rip.

Trying to avoid the sticky surface, trim the corners with a pair of scissors. Once the piece is ready, flatten the interior fill and gently slip the piece of tape inside with a clean stick, keeping the sticky side facing you and the slick side lying on top of the fill.

Once the tape is in place, close the tear on top of the duct tape, and you're done. It might take a try or two before you get it right, but once you're done the hole will be closed, there won't be any sign of the tear, and the stuffing will stay intact.

LOFTY EXPECTATIONS

Traditional down, synthetic downs, and even the new

waterproof downs need to be kept clean in order for them to retain their loft, which gives these garments the ability to retain heat.

To clean them, use a front-loading washer on gentle cycle with at least one extra rinse. Make sure you use a soap that rinses clean, like Sport Wash or Sensi Clean. Do not use Woolite, traditional granular detergent, or any fabric softener. The key is to completely rinse out any detergents, since these notably hamper the fill's performance.

Once the garments are ready for the dryer, toss in a tennis shoe or a hard rubber ball and dry on medium heat until they're completely dry. —P.B.M.



READER TIPS



DUAL-PURPOSE DECOYS

RATHER THAN BUY DOZENS OF FLOATING AND FIELD DECOYS, I USE MY FLOATERS BOTH ON THE WATER AND IN THE FIELD

BY DAVID DOYLE, WORLAND, WY



[HOW TO]

"First, using my table saw, I cut a slot in the horizontal part of a 1½ x 1½ x ¾-inch PVC tee to accommodate a floater's keel, then I insert a ¾-inch PVC leg. Early in the season, I put the leg directly into the ground. I slide it over a piece of ½-inch rebar when the ground is frozen. A 5-gallon bucket will tote the rebar and stands for about three dozen decoys. The PVC materials run about \$2.50 per decoy."

GEAR

BOW SIGHT COVER

BY MICHELLE HARMES, WATERTOWN, NY

"I use a foam drink koozie to protect my bow sight when I'm walking to and from my stand. Most fit with no modifications."



SURVIVAL

HOMEMADE FIRE STARTERS

By Byron Crownover, Batesville, AR

► "Cut a newspaper into 1-inch strips, roll strips up tightly, and tie string around the rolls, leaving about ½-inch of string as the wick. Melt burnt-down candles or paraffin wax in an old pot. Saturate the newspaper rounds in the melted wax. Set aside to cool. Store the rolls in a zip-top bag in your pack."



FROM TOP: CLIFF GARDNER & JOHN KELLER (2); JUSTIN APPENZELLER (NEWSPAPER)



MAKE SURE PEOPLE DON'T END UP HUNTING FOR YOU.

inReach Explorer — the world's only satellite communicator with built-in navigation.



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EGG TAKERS

HEARTLAND CAVIAR, THE EGGS FROM SWOLLEN-RIVER PADDLEFISH, IS BIG BUSINESS IN OKLAHOMA. BUT DOES COMMERCIALIZING A WILD RESOURCE PUT IT IN DANGER?

BY STEVE WAGNER





THE EGG TAKERS



PRESSED TIGHT to the starboard gunwale of his guide's deep-V, anchored in the dirty roil of a rain-swollen river, retired cop Jeff Puckett powers through a racking lesson on leverage.

Calves straining, forearms burning, back aching, and with a purple bruise spreading low on his belly from the butt-end of a surf rod, Puckett applies more force to his side of the lever, but the object on the other end barely budes.

"It's like dragging for a sunken car," he grunts, grinning over the pain.

In mid snicker, Puckett's dad, Gary, who has been sweeping his rod in wide arcs across the boat's port side, suddenly sticks a fish of his own. Now the elder Puckett is learning all about leverage, too.

Father and son gradually winch their loads—two 40-pound paddlefish, each with a treble hook buried in its side—across the current, up to the surface, and back to the stern, where the guide hoists them aboard. Both fish are spawning females, bellies distended with shiny black eggs.

Those ova have come to



symbolize both life and death for this species.

Each dark capsule contains genetic coding, DNA-borne traits that have allowed paddlefish to survive since the Mesozoic Era. In the slow chaos of time on Earth, flora and fauna come and go, emerge and then pass into oblivion. Yet this unique life form has been reproducing itself with few evolutionary changes for 75 million years.

But paddlefish roe also has another notable use—as an hors d'oeuvre served on toast points. And that's where this fishing story gets messy.

Since the Pucketts are in Oklahoma, they're not allowed to keep the full bounty of eggs from their catch. To remain within the law, Jeff and Gary are required to throw away most of the roe—or, alternatively, donate all of it to the state, which processes and sells paddlefish caviar worldwide, collecting some \$2 million a year.

Officials say it's all about fisheries research and salvaging a byproduct to generate supplemental funding for conservation.

Critics call it heavy-handed government. They worry about commercialization and market-driven poaching of a relatively fragile native species. And they question whether a fish-and-wildlife agency is exploiting a public-trust resource for a different kind of leverage, in which paddlefish are the lever and the object at the far end is profit.

Commercial exploitation of wildlife is what condemned many of America's game species to decades of overharvest, these critics say, and gave rise to the establishment of state game agencies a century ago. Do we really want to go back to putting a dollar value on wild species?

GRAY GOLD

THE "CHEVROLET OF CAVIAR," according to chef Wolfgang Puck, paddlefish eggs have been commercially available for more than a century, though traditionally they've been shunned by connoisseurs. Favor went to beluga sturgeon from the Caspian Sea. Their gleaming eggs, called pearls, are larger and firmer, with a sumptuous "pop" of flavor when pressed between the tongue and roof of the mouth.

But demand for the delicacy gradually outpaced supply. As beluga caviar grew scarcer, retail prices in the U.S. soared to \$300 an ounce, fueling rampant overharvest, both legal and illegal.

"Throughout the world, the history of caviar is the history of fish population exploitation," said Brad Schmitz, a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Department fisheries manager, in a 2007 interview. "If caviar stocks are not tightly regulated, the fish population can eventually disappear."

Exhibit A is the Caspian Sea's beluga, where sturgeon numbers finally tipped into an actionable nosedive. International trade in wild beluga caviar was restricted in 1996 under the governance of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and banned entirely in the U.S. in 2005.

All of which caused aficionados worldwide to take a second look at the prehistoric, odd-looking fish from the Mississippi River basin.

CLASS OF '99

SOME 450 RIVER MILES from the main stem of America's big river, in the hilly uplift of the Ozarks in northeast Oklahoma, is Grand Lake.



Paddlefishers line the shore of Montana's Yellowstone River (top), casting large treble hooks (far right) to snag fish in the heavy current. As in Oklahoma, Montana fisheries personnel monitor the harvest but also net and tag paddlefish (right) to estimate the species' population and distribution.





Nourished by two main tributaries, the 46,500-acre impoundment is the state's most productive paddlefish fishery.

In 2004, technicians with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) were conducting routine netting surveys to assess fish populations in Grand when they discovered a significant change from previous years. Nets were suddenly laden with five-year-old paddlefish.

It was the first evidence that unprecedented spawning success had occurred in 1999. Biologists are unsure exactly what caused the huge spike in productivity, but they knew right away that a massive year-class of paddlefish was just two to three years away from reproductive age.

By 2006, forecasts showed, these fish would begin springtime spawning runs out of the lake and into the rivers. Commercial fishing had been outlawed since 1992, but the coming rush would be a boon to recreational snaggers who gather each spring to wait for the meaty, egg-swollen spoonbills to arrive. ODWC officials anticipated an extraordinary opportunity for research on paddlefish reproduction, recruitment, growth, and mortality.

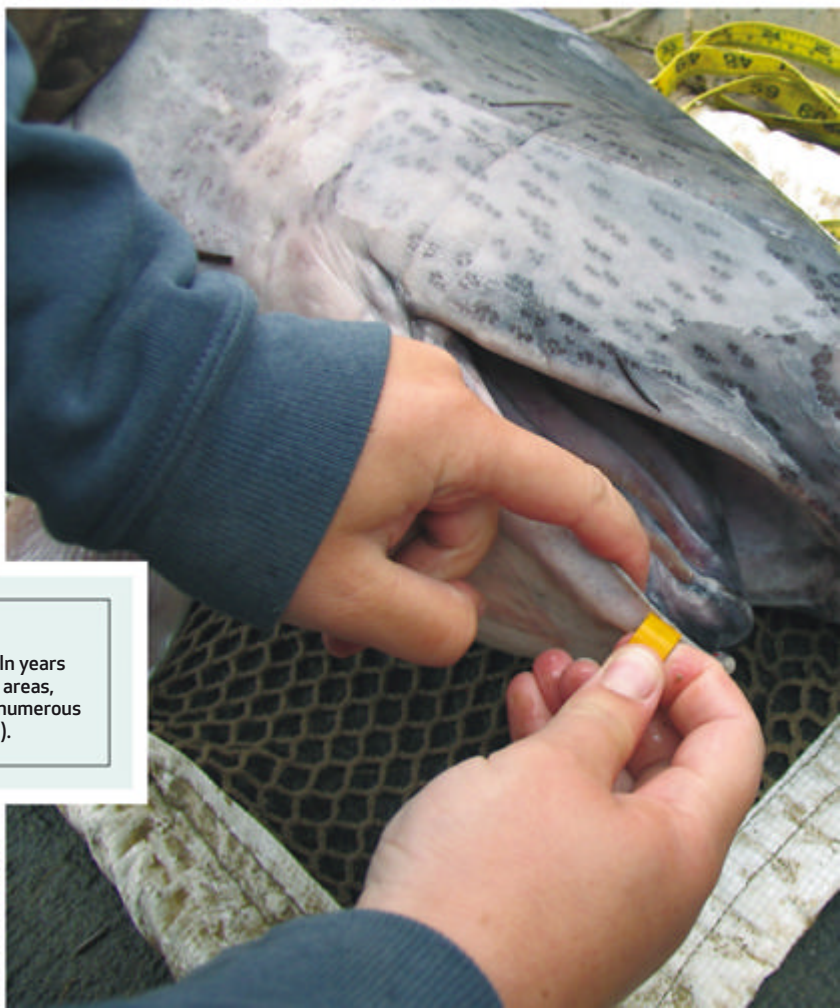
And given the decline of beluga sturgeon, they anticipated making some money in the process.

DATA AND DOLLARS

IN 2008, ODWC OPENED the Paddlefish Research Center above Grand Lake. Anglers are encouraged, but not required, to hand over both male and female paddlefish to the center. In return, fish are filleted, packaged, and returned to the angler for free, but the center keeps all of the roe. Some years, in the span of a few weeks, nearly 4,000 fish are donated.

Technicians collect data on each specimen's sex, weight, length, age, and health. The massive data set has management value beyond the local fishery.

"ODWC's research on population dynamics has been directly applicable to our work restoring paddlefish populations elsewhere in the region," says Brent Bristow, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service project leader who works down state at the Tishomingo National



A Yellowstone River snagger shows off his first paddlefish (top). In years of high spring runoff, paddlefish congregate in specific spawning areas, giving both anglers and fishery biologists a chance to encounter numerous fish. A biologist tags the jaw of a Missouri River paddlefish (right).





Fish Hatchery. The hatchery uses broodstock from Grand to help reestablish paddlefish in other parts of its native range.

In addition to its research functions, the Paddlefish Research Center is a food-processing facility with sanitary protocols, inspections, and certifications.

Eggs can compose an astounding 25 percent of a female paddlefish's live weight. Thus, a 40-pounder can yield 10 pounds of caviar, making it an extremely valuable prize—but only for ODWC. Regulations prohibit individuals from possessing more than 3 pounds of roe, and the private sale of eggs is strictly forbidden.

Once the roe is removed from the skein—the membrane that holds eggs together—it is screened, rinsed, salted, graded, and frozen in plastic containers, ready for sale.

Since this is a state enterprise, lots are sold in order to the highest bidder. On a continental scale, CITES lists paddlefish as “vulnerable,” a ranking between “near threatened” and “endangered.” But because the Grand Lake population is robust, and CITES recognizes that a resource's monetary value is a motive for managing it sustainably, ODWC was granted permits to export caviar. The agency is now among the biggest wholesalers of roe in North America. Buyers come from around the globe, especially Asia.

The first year, ODWC sold more than 8,000 pounds. Production doubled in 2009, and reached a single-year high topping 18,000 pounds in 2013. All together, from 2008 to 2014, the agency has sold more than 97,000 pounds—48 tons—of paddlefish eggs.

ODWC's total gross revenue from caviar sales exceeds \$12.7 million over the past seven years. Proceeds go into the agency's general fund, helping to pay for everything from paddlefish researcher salaries to game warden trucks to headquarters copy paper.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

SUCH FINANCIAL SUCCESS HAS led to conflict. Those fussing loudest over Oklahoma's caviar operation are the outcompeted. Commercial outfits in neighboring states pay employees to harvest paddlefish. Now recreational anglers were paying ODWC, via fishing licenses, for the same job. Lower overhead, lower price.

“A government agency is depressing the market,” says Steve Kahrs, a caviar producer for Missouri's Osage Catfisheries. “That's our biggest issue with Oklahoma. They screwed everybody. We have interested buyers waiting for Oklahoma to set the price before they'll buy from us.”

Another groan came from local snaggers. ODWC promoted the paddlefish bonanza and liberal creel limits, seeding an invasion of both resident and nonresident anglers. Oklahoma country music stars Blake Shelton and Miranda Lambert even joined agency leaders for a state-produced TV show about snagging paddlefish. The number of paddlefish anglers in Oklahoma tripled between 2008 and 2012.

The surge added to already-mounting pressures. Guides booked additional clients, boat traffic increased at a fishery once limited to bank fishermen, and new side-view sonar equipment allowed more anglers to locate and snag paddlefish staging in areas where no one had bothered to cast before.

Word spread among scofflaws, too. In 2014, paddlefish caviar retailed for about \$25 an ounce. But buyers willing to deal in the black market could get it for half that price. Poachers took advantage of the fact that a 40-pound female paddlefish was worth \$2,000. Game warden captain Jeff Brown told the *Tulsa World* newspaper that his team now spends “more time protecting paddlefish than any other critter.”

Oklahoma's resident hunters and anglers haven't seen a license fee increase since 2005, the longest interval since the 1960s. Nevertheless, for some sportsmen, the whole caviar saga leaves a sour taste.

“Maybe the state should take and sell a backstrap from every deer we



DIY CAVIAR

The word “caviar” appeared in the English language in the 1500s, but Egyptians were pickling roe as early as 2400 B.C. In some cultures, caviar was reserved for royalty. In 19th century America, it was served free at saloons, where the salty flavor caused patrons to drink more beer.

Today, caviar comes from sturgeon, paddlefish, salmon, trout, and other species.

Chef Anthony Compagni of Benvenuti's Ristorante in Norman, Okla., is well versed in the caviars of the world—and he's partial to paddlefish.

“Beluga is the most famous, especially among caviar snobs. But for the American palate, paddlefish has a more enjoyable flavor, and it's usually fresher,” says Compagni. “Paddlefish caviar can be served plain on a nice cracker, or with cream cheese, chopped green onion, Tabasco, or lime. Even people who don't like caviar usually go nuts for paddlefish caviar served this way.”

For a delicacy of such fuss and fame, caviar is surprisingly simple to make.

Compagni recommends removing roe from the outer membrane, or skein, by sifting it through a pizza screen. Place the eggs in a colander and rinse with fresh, cold water. Then add sea salt totaling 3 percent of the weight of the eggs. It's a classic process called *malossol*, Russian for “little salt.”

kill,” lifelong Oklahoma hunter and angler Gary Giudice says mockingly. He adds, “There's a market-hunting mentality surrounding paddlefish, and it feels wrong. We have great fishing and hunting, good habitat, and a diversity of wildlife. I know all that costs money. But it's a shame that getting funding for conservation has come down to this.”

A WINDOW CLOSSES

WHILE PADDLEFISH IN NORTHERN CLIMES can live 50 years, life is shorter at latitudes like that of Grand Lake. Here, survival after age 15 drops precipitously. ODWC's paddlefish management plan predicts, “After 2015, the year class of 1999 will experience very high natural mortality as most fish that are not harvested will have lived out their natural life spans.”

The population spike was always destined to normalize—with or without additional harvest or research. Or caviar.

So how does a conservation agency balance a short-term opportunity for budgetary reward against its long-term duty to protect, manage, and sustain paddlefish for the citizens of Oklahoma?

It's a question that clearly annoys ODWC fisheries chief Barry Bolton, who says the program's only driver is science; the revenue side simply is what it is.

“The Paddlefish Research Center was built on the fact that anglers were going to harvest these fish anyway, and the fact that anglers aren't allowed to keep the eggs. We're salvaging roe that was going to end up as waste when these fish were cleaned,” says Bolton. “From the outset, our biologists, our agency, and our commission agreed to support this concept only if it was driven by research and doing what's best for the resource. Since 2008, I've never seen a situation where that wasn't the case.”

In 2008, anglers could keep three paddlefish a day. In 2010, the daily limit was reduced to one, with harvest allowed only on certain days of the week. In 2013, ODWC closed one of Grand's main tributaries as a paddlefish refuge, and closed snagging at night. In 2014, the agency enacted a two-fish annual limit.

Bolton offers the progressively reduced limits—good for paddlefish populations but bad for the agency's income—as proof that ODWC is resource first. He concedes, though, that every revenue stream is important.

“All conservation agencies today struggle with funding,” says Bolton. “Costs are going up, but hunting and fishing license sales are mostly flat or declining. Federal grants aren't bridging the gap. To make up the difference, we have to be creative and rely on timber sales, hay grazing, ag leases, and oil and gas revenue.”

Caviar is one more commodity to help leverage the future of conservation. 🌲🌲🌲



Montana's Yellowstone River hosts a paddlefish caviar collection station similar to the one on Oklahoma's Grand Lake. In return for cleaning and packaging snaggers' fish, a concession licensed by the state processes and sells paddlefish roe.

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DEER HUNTING



WHITETAIL MANAGEMENT

WHITETAIL HUNTING IN AMERICA HAS BOOMED AND BUSTED. AFTER YEARS OF RECORD HIGHS, HARVESTS IN MANY OF THE POWERHOUSE DEER STATES ARE DOWN, AND THEY'RE STAYING DOWN. THE TOP DEER EXPERTS AROUND THE COUNTRY ARE ACCEPTING THIS AS THE NEW NORMAL. SO WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED? LET'S START WITH THESE SIX RULES

BY TONY HANSEN, MARK KENYON, AND ALEX ROBINSON





RULE
NUMBER
ONE

EXPECTATIONS ARE TOO HIGH

The average deer hunter in America has higher expectations today than ever before. Flip the television to any hunting show and you'll find a host like Mark Drury of *Drury Outdoors*, who killed six bucks last season scoring more than 130 inches, four of which were over 150. Or pull up your Facebook newsfeed on a random day in early November, and you'll probably see 10 buddies showing off pictures of their giant bucks. But just because trophy deer are more present in the media doesn't mean that they're easier to kill. In fact, Boone and Crockett Club entries are down across the country (see map at right).

Average deer hunters have expectations that cannot be met and they're left disappointed, says Neil Dougherty, an experienced wildlife consultant who works on whitetail properties across the country. "So many people I speak to today are living in Outdoor Channel la-la land, where every deer has to be four years old and 150 inches or they won't shoot it. And these guys only have a property of 200 acres or less," he says.

BACK TO REALITY

So where should you set your expectations? Dougherty says to start by determining your goals. Are you most interested in antler size, age class, numbers of deer, or just an overall quality hunting experience? Lastly, what are you willing to give up? Are you really willing to eat your buck tag?

Once you decide on a set of criteria, you need to research the standards for that criteria in your hunting area. If you're interested in antler size, look into local big-buck club data, or B&C and Pope and Young Club record books for your county and focus on the last 10 years. If you're looking to manage for age, local wildlife biologists might be able to provide insight into what age class of deer is typically being taken in the area. From there, Dougherty says, set your expectations based on the habitat you're hunting.

"The top 10 percent [in age class or antler size] for that area is what a landowner should realistically strive for, but that's only if the habitat is really tuned up," he says. If you don't have high-quality cover and food, targeting the top 25 percent in age or antler class is a more realistic goal. But if the fun starts to wane, get back to the basics.

"Sometimes you just need to be successful," Dougherty says. "Maybe you take a buck you normally wouldn't—maybe it's a younger age class. But if things all come together—you've worked really hard and an opportunity arises and you're excited—you should be able to kill that buck and do it unapologetically." —Mark Kenyon

BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ENTRIES IN 2013

PERCENTAGE OF 2013 ENTRIES COMPARED TO PREVIOUS 4-YEAR AVERAGE.
(MOST RECENT DATA AVAILABLE)



SOURCE: THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB

RULE
NUMBER
TWO

EVERY DEER HUNTER IS A MANAGER

I will always remember the summer of 2012. It was the summer that smelled of death. Southerly breezes would carry the stench of rotting whitetail carcasses—deer that had died from the worst outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) in Michigan history—from the nearby river bottom toward my house.

One year later, I bought a small chunk of hunting land that adjoins that river bottom. It might seem like a stretch to talk about "managing" deer that live on 17 acres, but it's my responsibility to do the best I can. And every decision I've made links back to that summer.

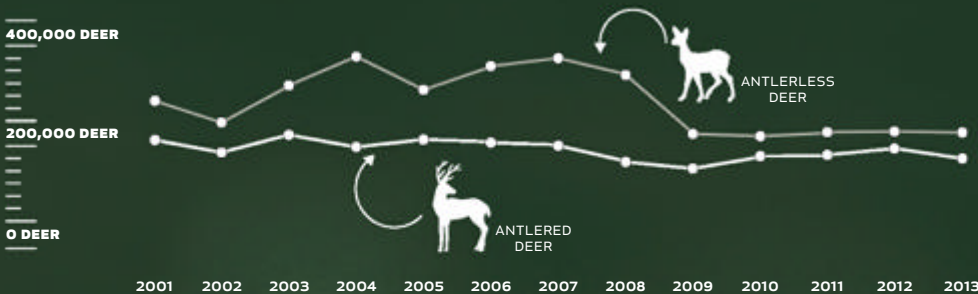
It wasn't that I mistrusted the antlerless quotas set by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. It was that I simply understood a harvest quota covering a county-size unit should not be a one-size-fits-all guideline, and I had positive, putrid proof that EHD had taken a sizable number of deer in my area. Even after the local EHD die-off, the state was offering antlerless tags in my unit. I could have taken five does that year, but I didn't, knowing that any additional doe mortality would have been devastating.

Dr. Russ Mason, wildlife division chief for the Michigan DNR, tends to agree. "We can do whatever we want, as a state, to manage the 20 percent of Michigan that we own. But landowners and hunters will ultimately determine the management direction on the 80 percent that we do not own," he says.

So Michigan is developing a land co-op coordinator position and has created programs specifically to focus on private land management. And they are not just focusing on basic methods of management like antler-point restrictions. They're looking at complex issues of habitat quality, density goals, and landowner collaboration.

"There is this notion that 'I'm willing to do the right things but my neighbor isn't,'" Mason says. "So we talk to that neighbor. And guess what he says? 'I'm willing to do the right things but my neighbor isn't.' As hunters, we've got to do better than that." —Tony Hansen

BUCK VS ANTLERLESS HARVEST IN WISCONSIN



SOURCE: WISCONSIN DNR (ABOVE); QDMA (RIGHT)

43%

RATE OF DECLINE OF IOWA'S BUCK HARVEST OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS



Buckzillas like this deer might show up all the time in magazines and on TV, but only seven 200-inchers were entered into B&C records for the 2014 season.

ESTIMATED PENNSYLVANIA DEER HARVEST



*NO DATA AVAILABLE FOR 2006-2007 SEASON; SOURCE: PENNSYLVANIA DNR



PRIVATE LAND IN WHITETAIL COUNTRY

SOURCE: QDMA



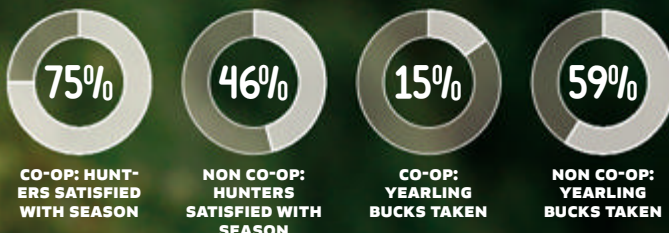
STATES WITH HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF PRIVATE LAND



SOURCE: QDMA

CO-OP HUNTERS VS NON CO-OP HUNTERS IN MICHIGAN

A 2014 STUDY SHOWS THAT CO-OPS REALLY WORK



SOURCE: MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

TRACKING CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE



SOURCE: CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE ALLIANCE

THIS PAGE: LANCE KRUEGER (HUNTER); OPPOSITE: DAVID J. SAMIS; B. MIJNJEFF/THE NOUN PROJECT (DEER) (CON)


**RULE
NUMBER
THREE**

CWD IS STILL THE GREATEST THREAT TO WHITETAILS

Management, by definition, implies a system of processes intentionally designed and implemented to achieve a set of desired results.

Want to improve the age structure of bucks in your area? Protect young bucks and, over time, the percentage of mature animals should increase.

But there is an aspect of deer management that is beyond control, an aspect that has had measurable affects in many areas of whitetail country and will likely continue to have an affect long into the future: disease.

Epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) has stolen headlines in recent years with massive deer kills in storied deer-hunting locations like Montana's Milk River and western Illinois. But the deer experts I spoke to insist that chronic wasting disease (CWD) is still the greatest threat to deer, both locally and nationally.

CWD is an always fatal, contagious neurological disease. It is transmitted by infected prions from infected animals. It's unknown just how long these prions can last in the soil and environment, but it has proven to be resistant to extreme heat and disinfecting procedures.

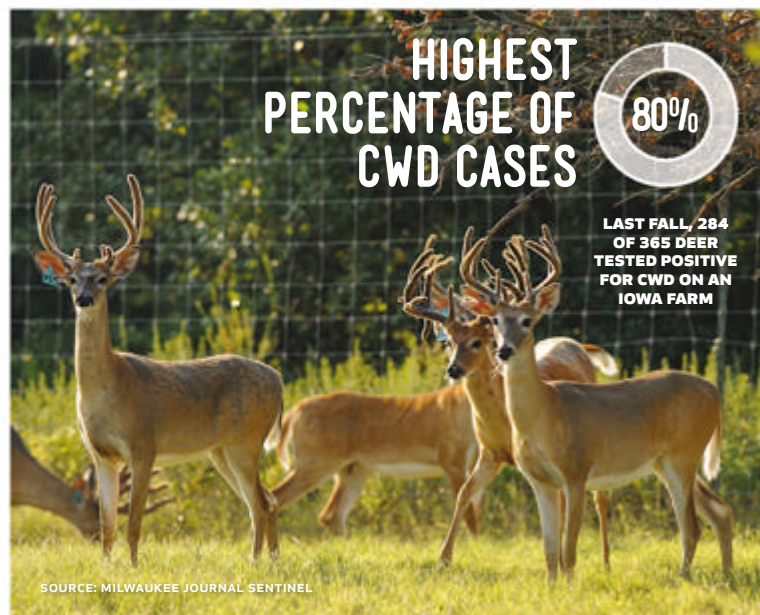
"CWD is the disease that I have nightmares about," says whitetail expert Grant Woods. "In areas with CWD, no one can predict what will happen because we do not know. Once it's there, it's likely there forever. It seems like hunters in areas with CWD have learned to live with it. But we need to get it back on the front page. We are talking about a national treasure when talking about our whitetail population. And CWD is a very real risk to that treasure."

To Woods and Dr. Russ Mason, wildlife division chief for the Michigan DNR, future management decisions involving CWD should focus on stopping its spread, not controlling the areas where it's been found.

"CWD is more of a biological poison than a disease. I would compare it more to radioactive waste than something like the flu," Mason says. "The experience in Wisconsin has shown that we can't just kill all the deer in the area and stop it. They've done that and the prevalence rates are higher than they've ever been. The only success we have seen are in areas where the very first animals to be infected were found immediately and killed."

To Woods, the first, most critical step in stopping the spread of CWD is obvious: Stop the transport of captive deer.

"The data shows very clearly that every instance of CWD infection has a captive cervid component—the infection occurs near a captive cervid facility," Woods says. "And it's not mom-and-pop operations but large, aggressive farms that are shipping deer. When we ship deer, bad things happen." —T.H.


**RULE
NUMBER
FOUR**

CO-OPS ARE THE FUTURE

Land and co-ops might be the next cornerstone of state-level management, but they're also the most consistent way for an individual hunter to kill mature deer.

This is so for two simple reasons: (1) In order to effectively manage deer, you need to have access to the majority of the deer's home range. (2) Most individual hunters can't afford to buy or lease that much property. A quick example: A buck's home range can span a square mile or more, and on average, a Quality Deer Management Association member owns fewer than 200 acres of land.

Nobody knows this better than renowned whitetail photographer Charlie Alsheimer. In 1989, Alsheimer hunted with Al Brothers—who many consider to be the grandfather of quality deer management—in Texas and was blown away by the program there. Brothers persuaded Alsheimer to start a co-op where he lived and hunted in western New York, which was the heart of if-it's-brown-it's-down deer-hunting culture.

Alsheimer went to neighbors and told them what he planned to do. So, a group of four neighbors made a gentleman's agreement to manage their combined 750 acres.

Their rules are simple and attainable: Target 3½-year-old bucks and older. Each hunter can kill only one buck per season. First-time hunters can kill any legal deer. Everybody participates in the doe harvest.

By the fourth year, Alsheimer had killed a 140-inch 9-pointer and his neighbor had shot a 150-inch 10-point—both were their biggest New York deer ever. Alsheimer and his buddies don't kill trophy bucks every season, but they've had two decades of good hunting for mature deer.

Quality deer management co-ops are by no means a new concept, but groups like Whitetail Properties and the QDMA are now having more success implementing them. Whitetail Properties agents have taken to setting up "neighborhoods," stretches of adjoining properties that are all managed by like-minded hunters. "Deer hunters are a lot more educated today than they used to be," says Whitetail Properties land specialist Aaron Milliken, who sells land and sets up management neighborhoods in western Illinois. "And by now, quality deer management is proven. We've got the numbers to back it up, so it's not as hard convincing people."

Both Milliken and Alsheimer agree that patience is the key to starting a co-op. Over beers (or coffee), tell neighbors what you would like to do, and if they like it, great. If not, don't pressure them. Sometimes a holdout will decide to join after he sees the co-op's success and some trail-camera pictures of trophy deer. —Alex Robinson



RULE
NUMBER
FIVE

IT'S POLITICAL SCIENCE

Deer management, like other political issues, isn't always guided by pure science. Often it's the constituents who complain the loudest that end up calling the shots. You can see such a struggle being played out in Pennsylvania. In the 34 years that Matt Hough has worked for the Pennsylvania Game Commission, he's responded to ever-changing public opinion.

"You set antlerless harvests to get the population down until hunters start clamoring that there aren't enough deer, so you back off and the pendulum swings the other way," says Hough, who is now executive director of the game commission. "Eventually the farmers and foresters complain about too many deer, so you jack up the antlerless harvest and swing the pendulum back."

As a way to balance the varying public demands, the game commission adopted an ecosystem-based management plan in the early 2000s. The concept was to manage the deer herd based on the habitat—not deer harvest numbers—to promote a healthier herd and a more diverse state forest. (The state's timber industry has a total economic impact of \$27 billion annually.)

Enter Gary Alt's stump-speech campaign: antler-point restrictions and massive deer harvests. Now, 15 years later, some deer hunters are happy with the results, which tend to be fewer deer sightings but more mature bucks. However, many others are ready for a coup. A 2011 game commission survey found that only 27 percent of hunters were satisfied with the number of antlered deer they'd seen.

Last summer, a coalition of sportsmen's groups got five of their own deer-hunting bills drafted by state representatives. Their tactic was to sidestep the commission and run the bills through the legislature (a worst-case scenario for the commission). The bills weren't voted on, but the message was heard loud and clear by the board of commissioners.

"I think that the majority of commissioners feel they need to increase the herd. [In 2000] they reduced the herd, and they stayed the course. But I don't think they can keep it up," Hough says. "The commissioners get pounded."

There's still opportunity for Pennsylvania deer hunters and hunters across the country who find themselves in a similar scenario. The new hunting environment in the state favors more dedicated deer hunters, Hough says. There are longer seasons and more tags available now than ever before. So although there might be fewer deer killed, the most die-hard hunters have a chance to punch their tags during the bow or late muzzleloader seasons.

"Times have changed," he says. "The most successful hunters adapt." —A.R.

RULE
NUMBER
SIX

YOU CAN SHOOT TOO MANY DOES

For the better part of the last two decades, the mantra for many serious deer hunters was to waylay does. Deer densities were too high and the focus had shifted from seeing a lot of deer to targeting mature bucks. If a hunter decided to pass on young bucks, shooting does was a good way to put venison in the freezer. More recently, though, hunters have learned that you most certainly *can* shoot too many does, and when you do, the consequences are severe.

Take, for example, the scenario that Glenn Horton, former president of the Cherokee Preserve Club in New York State, experienced in the early 2000s. A typical hunting season at the club would see the members take 8 to 12 bucks a year. But then the state offered a significantly higher number of DMAP antlerless tags. The club was offered an additional 25 antlerless tags, and Horton says that during the first year, members used almost all of them. Then a bad winter hit the Northeast. After a second year of a high doe kill, the club, which has more than 35 members, killed only three bucks.

"We definitely put a hurt on the population," Horton says. "That year changed everything." The club suffered years of poor hunting before deer numbers bounced back.

This isn't just an isolated case, either. Neil Dougherty has seen it happen on some of the properties he manages. With more severe mortality factors affecting deer today (EHD, predation, hard winters), wildlife managers are learning that deer populations, in many cases, can't handle high hunter harvests.

"When we have all this stuff together," Dougherty says, "we need to be extremely sensitive to an overharvest of does."

Hunters can't control winter severity or EHD outbreaks, but by being careful not to mismanage does, we can at least avoid total disaster. This should be done through monitoring doe and fawn numbers in the spring and summer with consistent trail-camera work.

According to Dr. Russ Mason, wildlife division chief for the Michigan DNR, maintaining higher numbers of does will likely position the herd for a faster recovery from an EHD outbreak or mass winter kill. The key is to not put the herd in a position where it can't bounce back. —M.K.



TROUT ♦ CRAPPIES ♦ BASS

FISHING

Our four battle-tested rod-and-reel combos will whip any bass, anywhere.

TACKLE

THE FULL QUIVER

How do you strike a happy medium between an exhaustive complement of rod-and-reel combos and a one-rod workhorse? Here's our four-rod arsenal of favorite bass-fishing weapons that will help you master nearly every imaginable angling scenario. **BY TODD KUHN**

THE ENFORCER



The Invicta rod's golf club-like grip provides all-day, no-slip fishing comfort.

BEST SUITED FOR

Big Swimbaits and Wake Baits, Alabama Rigs, Frogs

► Yanking chunky fish out of matted vegetation or pulling heavy swimbaits requires stout gear.

Our industrial-strength rod-and-reel combo includes a 7-foot 6-inch **Castaway Invicta** rod and an **Abu Garcia Revo Beast** reel. Though robust, the Invicta is surprisingly sensitive and easily handles big baits and magnum fish without fuss. The Winn nonslip split grip is impervious to wet, nasty conditions and provided enough leverage to muscle fish from cover.

With 22 pounds of drag force, the Abu Garcia Beast is a stout cranker. In our test on Lake Okeechobee, I punched the thickest hydrilla, dragging deeply wedged fish (up to 9 pounds) out without a hitch. (ROD: \$250, CASTAWAYRODS.COM; REEL: \$350, ABUGARCIA.COM)

THE SLINGER

BEST SUITED FOR

Spinnerbaits, Jigs, Worms

► While road-testing this featherlight combo on Sam Rayburn Reservoir in Texas, I found that it excelled at bouncing spinnerbaits through standing timber and creeping jigs through shoreline brush piles.

The 7-foot **Fenwick Elite Tech** medium-heavy rod let me get on top of long casts and cover plenty of water while burning spinnerbaits in search of scattered fish. With a retrieve ratio of 6.2:1, the **Shimano Chronarch 150 C14** reel was ideally suited for working weighted baits in the majority of fishing situations. The extra-low profile made palming the reel easy, which is a great advantage when working contact baits such as jigs and worms. (ROD: \$150, FENWICKFISHING.COM; REEL: \$269, SHIMANO FISHING.COM)

THE CRANKER

BEST SUITED FOR

Topwater Lures, Crankbaits, Jerkbait

► Our hard-bait combo consists of a 7-foot 3-inch **Kistler Helium 3** rod and a **Lew's Lite Speed Spool TLL1H** baitcasting reel.

The rod's action is what sets it apart from others. The extra-fast taper of the Helium's tip is subtle, flexes flawlessly, and keeps fish buttoned up on the light-gauge wire hooks typically found on topwaters, crankbaits, and jerkbaits.

The Lew's Lite Speed Spool retrieves 28 inches of line per turn and offers a perfect compromise between a slow, pure cranking reel and a high-speed burner. It has plenty of low end for cranking down deep-diving crankbaits while still managing topwater retrieve cadences. It easily handles the light lines often used with hard baits. (ROD: \$260, KISTLERRODS.COM; REEL: \$239, LEWS.COM)

THE ARTIST

BEST SUITED FOR

Tube Jigs, Shaky Heads, Drop-Shot Rigs

► When fish shut down, specialized gear is required to manage the thread-thin clear lines and micro-size baits necessary to turn the bite back on.

Our finesse rig includes an **Edge Black Widow DSR 6101** rod and a **Pflueger Patriarch** spinning reel. The Edge's supple tip allows users to paint the bottom with tempting morsel-size baits and features a gentle butt section for maneuvering big bass once they're hooked. When a cold front drove fish to deep shoals during our field test, the rod's limber tip proved perfect for drop-shotting inactive fish from deeper water.

The Patriarch's sealed drag proved startlingly silky, paying out without a bobble. (ROD: \$550, EDGE RODS.COM; REEL: \$199, PFLUEGERFISHING.COM)

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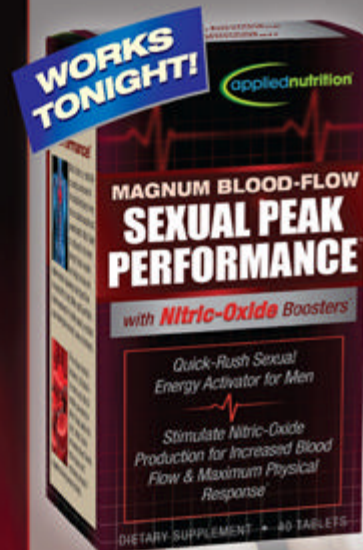


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FISHING
TROUT

STRIPPING MEAT

HOW TO USE BIG FLIES FOR SOLID FISH IN LITTLE STREAMS **BY PHILIP MONAHAN**



A streamer-caught holdover brown is released back into a Vermont stream.

In its most basic form, fishing for trout with streamers is one of the easier ways to catch fish with a fly rod: You simply cast across the river, or across and downstream, and then strip the fly back as it swings through the current below you. Subtle, fancy presentations are not as critical as they are in the clear water of summer and spring. Of course, there are ways that you can make streamer fishing more complex and more effective, but the basic cast-and-strip will work a lot of the time.

But what if the stream you're fishing is only a few yards, or even a few feet, across? In such cases, there's really not enough room to cast and swing, but that doesn't mean you can't serve up the meat to trout—sometimes the biggest fish—living in these smaller waters. Here's how to do it.

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THE DOWNSTREAM MEND

BEST PATTERN: ORVIS GO SCULPSNACK (\$2.75; ORVIS.COM), SIZE 8



► A downstream presentation allows you to drop your streamer directly into likely trout lies with great accuracy.

Start by roll-casting so that approximately 10 to 30 feet of line, plus the leader, is hanging in the current below you. With a short line, you can swing the fly from bank to bank simply by pointing your rod in the direction that you want the fly to go. With a longer line, you can mend in the direction you want the fly to move, causing the current to push on the line and drag the fly through the target zone. The size and power of the mends will give the fly different kinds of action in the water.

THE HIGH-STICK DEAD DRIFT

BEST PATTERN: BELDAR RUBBER LEG (\$2.50; SOLITUDEFLY.COM), SIZES 4-8



► To dead-drift a streamer, use your line to control the fly, as you would when fishing a nymph. High-sticking works great when you want to float the streamer along a cut bank or through a deep slot between two boulders.

Start by casting upstream, then raise your rod tip to pick up slack as the fly approaches. Once the fly goes past you, lower the rod tip to feed slack into the drift. The advantage of a streamer in these situations is that the take is rarely subtle. No strike indicator is necessary. When a trout attacks a baitfish, it almost always does so aggressively.

THE DOWNSTREAM STRIP

BEST PATTERN: BLACK NOSE DACE (\$1.25; MILLERSFLYSHOP.COM), SIZE 6-10



► When you're fishing a stream with cut banks and deep pools, trigger strikes from lurking trout by stripping your streamer downstream. An erratic retrieve best imitates an injured or panicked baitfish.

Cast upstream right along the bank or along any woody structure, such as a fallen tree or a beaver dam. Give the fly a second to sink, and then strip like mad to pick up the slack and make contact with the fly. Then alternate stripping and stopping to make the fly dart and stop, rise and sink. Expect the strike on the first strip after a pause.

CLIFF GARDINER & JOHN KELLER (3)

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This fat Lake Greeson, Arkansas, slab is destined for the frying pan



A DEGREE IN CRAPPIES

AS SPRINGTIME WATER TEMPERATURES HEAT UP, THE SPECK BITE TURNS ON **BY ALAN CLEMONS**

Catching slab crappies may be a challenge during some parts of the year but not in spring, when rising water temperatures put them in specific locations.

Here's how a couple of veteran guides and a tournament angler follow the big-slab bite.

WATER TEMPS: BELOW 55 DEGREES

► When spring water temperatures are still cool, longtime Oklahoma guide Barry Morrow (barrymro.com) likes to cover deeper water in his hunt for fish. He doubles down on slabs by trolling with two 11-foot Todd Huckabee rods with tandem-jig rigs.

"I'll have two rods, one in each hand, both rigged with an 1/8-ounce Lindy jig on top and a 1/4-ounce on bottom," Morrow says. "Color doesn't always make a big difference, but I like to tip the jigs with either a Lindy Fuzz-E Grub or Watsit grub. I troll breaklines for the most part from 8 to 14 feet deep, using my sonar and searching for fish. I'm specifically looking for the water column they're in, and often fish a lot of rock structure close to spawning areas.

"I move from deeper to shallower water throughout the day because fish will be deeper in the morning and move up as it warms," he says. "I focus on shallow water when there's a full or new moon,

the water temperature stays constant, or the water level is rising.

"If I find them up shallow and am using two jigs, that top jig might only be a couple of inches under the water. If I get a bite, then I'll back out, tie on a Lindy jig with a slip cork, and fire it up on the bank where it's 6 to 8 inches deep. Then we can cover every foot of water."

Morrow also checks smaller creeks, about 50 feet wide or less, with muddy banks, that will have laydown trees and brush. Crappies will be holding around or spawning on the wood in the absence of rocks or riprap.

"Crappies are similar to bass," Morrow says. "It's all about food and cover."

WATER TEMPS: 55 TO 60 DEGREES

► During this transition period, former guide and Kentucky Lake crappie guru Garry Mason of Tennessee gets rocks in his head.

"Crappies will be making their migratory run toward the spawning grounds near gravel and flooded brush," he says. "This puts those anglers who have learned how to take advantage of this migration in a great position to catch both quality and quantities of crappies."

Instead of trolling or dabbling, Mason ties on a 2-inch Charlie Brewer Crappie Slider grub and casts along gravel banks without a float. He lets the grub slowly sink and then steadily reels it back to the boat. The tiny, white-chartreuse grub and 1/16-ounce Slider head wiggles like a small minnow or insect, putting the crappies on alert. He uses 6-pound-test line on a spinning rod.

The gravel banks and natural cover such as flooded brush and downed trees, or man-made cover such as stake beds or sunken brush piles, will attract and hold fish.

"As crappies migrate toward their spawning areas, they tend to stage and feed," Mason says.

"Finding these staging areas and placing cover along the route can greatly increase the number of crappies anglers can catch during this pre-spawn period."

WATER TEMPS: 60 DEGREES AND UP

► Crappie tournament champions Gil "Sonny" Sipes and his cousin Coy are adept at finding big white and black crappies in Southeastern waters—whether on their home lakes in Alabama or on famed slab waters like Grenada or Sardis lakes in Mississippi.

"Water temperatures are going to be about 64 to 65 degrees by the middle of the day," Sonny says, "It's always a little cooler in the morning, but by midday it will hit the magic mark. We'll be fishing shallow."

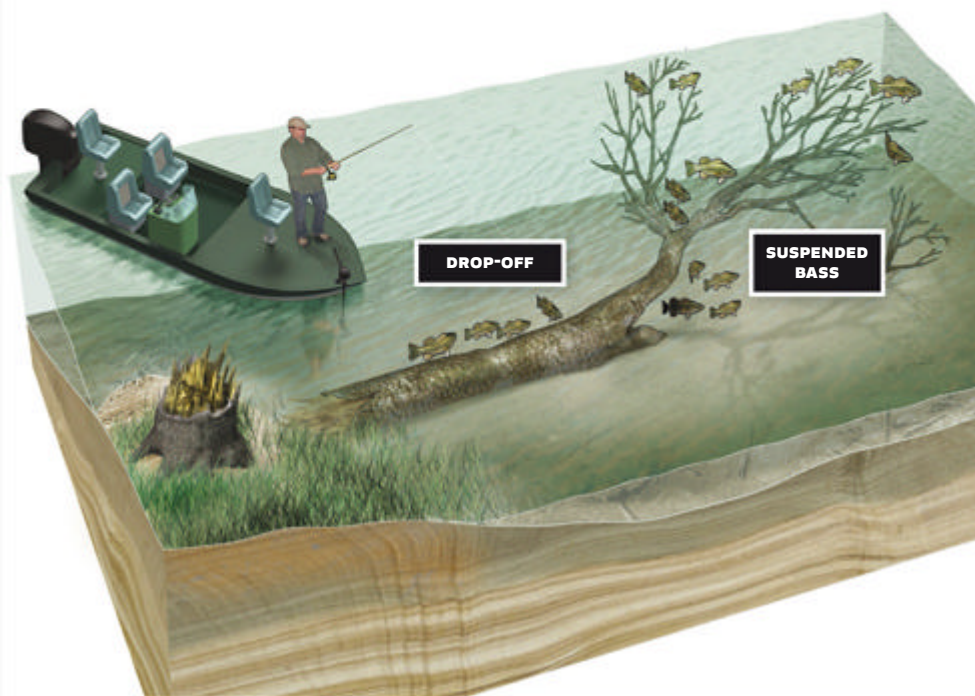
The pair slowly troll double minnow rigs or a minnow on top and a jig on the bottom. They'll also combine two Road Runners with willow-leaf blades: a 1/16-ounce on top and 1/4-ounce on the bottom, usually with chartreuse, black, or orange in stained water, and white, blue-white, or chartreuse in clear.

"We're concentrating on the backs of the creeks in water about 3 1/2 to 5 feet deep," Sonny says.

"We know they're going to be shallow—it's just a matter of how shallow," he says. "The females will hold deeper until that magic moment arrives when they move up and get with the males."

IT'S ALL GOOD IN THE WOOD

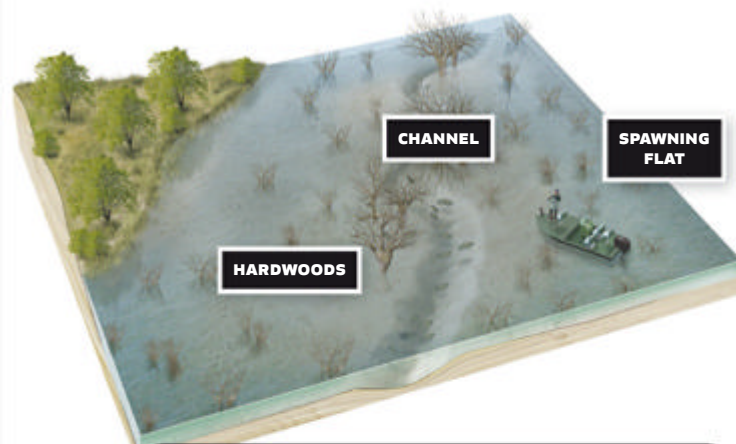
HOW TO BREAK DOWN WOODY STRUCTURE TO FIND LARGEMOUTH SWEET SPOTS **BY DAVID A. BROWN**



LAYDOWNS

☒ Bass pro Pete Ponds always starts on the outside perimeter and looks for the fullest, bushiest branches. The ones with lots of smaller branches and twigs attract suspending fish like isolated brush piles. From there, he'll move progressively farther into the tree's structure. Ponds focuses on the points where a main branch splits off from the trunk. This creates a Y space that fish will back into.

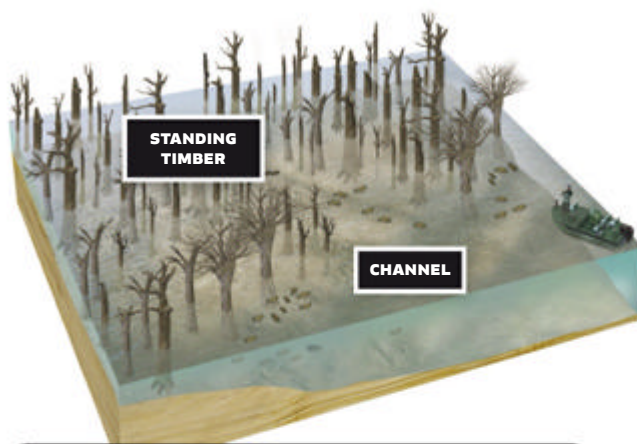
Lastly, Ponds will work the main trunk section. If one side of a lay-down has a deeper drop-off, he'll spend more time casting to it, as fish will utilize the depth change as a holding spot. From there they can move up to feed and then drop into safer depths.



SPAWNING CREEKS WITH SCATTERED TREES

☒ When Texas pro Stephen Johnston follows a creek channel back into a spawning area scattered with brush and small trees, he scans the cover for signs of channel turns where bass will gather. Anglers can discern these sweet spots by looking at the different types of wood.

Brush may be jumbled throughout most areas, but hardwoods will point to the key directional changes in a creek channel's course. Hardwoods grow on the inside edges of creek channels and signify target zones with high concentrations of bass.



MAIN-LAKE STANDING TIMBER

☒ So many trees, so little time—that's the common problem for anglers contemplating an expanse of main-lake standing timber. Bassmaster Elite Series pro Brett Hite has a few strategies for identifying the more productive areas. First, he targets the trees with the most structural features. In a cluster of trees, the ones with intact branches will offer fish more cover and ambush points. Also, Hite looks for obvious gaps running through a stand of timber. This is usually a creek, drain, or slough, which acts as a funnel for bass.

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64760721

SCISSOR SUPER COUPON!

1.51 CUBIC FT. SOLID STEEL DIGITAL FLOOR SAFE

Item 91006 shown
LOT NO. 91006/61565

SAVE \$70
\$99.99 REG. PRICE \$169.99

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64743088

SCISSOR WOW SUPER COUPON!

RAPID PUMP® 1.5 TON ALUMINUM RACING JACK

Item 60053 shown
LOT NO. 60053/60252
60569/62160/62496

SAVE \$60
\$59.99 ~~\$88.99~~
REG. PRICE \$119.99

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64746088

SCISSOR SUPER COUPON!

4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER drillmaster

Item 60625 shown
LOT NO. 95578
69645/60625

SAVE 50%
\$9.99 REG. PRICE \$19.99

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64723129

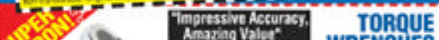
SCISSOR WOW SUPER COUPON!

900 PEAK/700 RUNNING WATTS 2 HP (63 CC) 2 CYCLE GAS RECREATIONAL GENERATOR

Item 60391 shown
LOT NO. 60391/60381
60338/62472

SAVE \$85
\$94.99 ~~\$129.99~~
REG. PRICE \$179.99

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64732335

SCISSOR SUPER COUPON!

SUPER-WIDE TRI-FOLD ALUMINUM LOADING RAMP

Item 90018 shown
LOT NO. 90018
69595/60334

SAVE \$70
\$79.99 REG. PRICE \$149.99

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64750741

SCISSOR SUPER COUPON!

60", 4 DRAWER HARDWOOD WORKBENCH

Item 93454 shown
LOT NO. 93454
69054

SAVE \$110
\$139.99 REG. PRICE \$249.99

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64755342

SCISSOR SUPER COUPON!

TORQUE WRENCHES

Item 229 shown
LOT NO. 229/6243

Accuracy within ±4%
\$9.99 ~~\$29.99~~
REG. PRICE \$29.99

SAVE 66%

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64755643

WOW SUPER COUPON!

10" SLIDING COMPOUND MITER SAW

CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS

Item 98199 shown

LOT NO. 98199/61307
61971/61972

SAVE 44%

\$8282 ~~\$11999~~

REG. PRICE \$199.99

64813952

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

1000 lb. Capacity MOVER'S DOLLY

HaulMaster

LOT NO. 93888/60497
61899/62399

Item 93888 shown

SAVE 40%

\$899 ~~\$14.99~~

REG. PRICE \$14.99

64877293

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

RETRACTABLE AIR HOSE REEL WITH 3/8" x 50 FT. HOSE

CENTRAL PNEUMATIC

Item 93897 shown

LOT NO. 93897/62344

SAVE 90%

\$5999 ~~\$99.99~~

REG. PRICE \$149.99

64845737

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

12 VOLT MAGNETIC TOWING LIGHT KIT

HaulMaster

LOT NO. 69925/69626
67455/62517

Item 67455 shown

SAVE 66%

\$999 ~~\$29.99~~

REG. PRICE \$29.99

64832657

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

45 WATT SOLAR PANEL KIT

Item 68751 shown

LOT NO. 68751/62443

SAVE 160%

\$13999 ~~\$18999~~

REG. PRICE \$299.99

64789441

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

3/8" x 75 FT. CAMOUFLAGE POLY ROPE

HaulMaster

Item 47835 shown

LOT NO. 47835/61674

SAVE 61%

\$349 ~~\$8.99~~

REG. PRICE \$8.99

64801810

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

1000 LB. CAPACITY SWING-BACK TRAILER JACK

HaulMaster

Item 41005 shown

LOT NO. 41005/69780

SAVE 50%

\$1999 ~~\$39.99~~

REG. PRICE \$39.99

64805203

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

1500 WATT DUAL TEMPERATURE HEAT GUN (572°/1112°)

drillmaster

Item 96289 shown

LOT NO. 96289/62340
62546

SAVE 70%

\$899 ~~\$29.99~~

REG. PRICE \$29.99

64835147

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

12 VOLT, 10/2/50 AMP BATTERY CHARGER/ENGINE STARTER

CENTECH

Item 60653 shown

LOT NO. 66783/60581
60653/62334

SAVE 62%

\$2999 ~~\$79.99~~

REG. PRICE \$79.99

64804071

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

ADJUSTABLE SHADE AUTO-DARKENING WELDING HELMET

REVERE WELDING

Item 46052 shown

LOT NO. 46092/61611

SAVE 55%

\$3599 ~~\$79.99~~

REG. PRICE \$79.99

64837383

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

56", 11 DRAWER INDUSTRIAL QUALITY ROLLER CABINET

US GENERAL

Item 67681 shown

LOT NO. 67681/68395/62499

SAVE 500%

\$69999 ~~\$79999~~

REG. PRICE \$1199.99

64849828

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

WIRELESS SECURITY ALERT SYSTEM

Bunker Hill Security

Item 93068 shown

LOT NO. 93068/69590
61910/62447

SAVE 60%

\$1199 ~~\$29.99~~

REG. PRICE \$29.99

64773628

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

ELECTRIC CHAIN SAW SHARPENER

CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS

Item 68221 shown

LOT NO. 68221/61613

SAVE 44%

\$2799 ~~\$49.99~~

REG. PRICE \$49.99

64808366

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

4 PIECE 1" x 15 FT. RATCHETING TIE DOWNS

HaulMaster

Item 90984 shown

LOT NO. 90984/60405
61524/62322

SAVE 60%

\$799 ~~\$19.99~~

REG. PRICE \$19.99

64823180

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

8", 5 SPEED BENCH MOUNT DRILL PRESS

CENTRAL MACHINERY

Item 60238 shown

LOT NO. 60238/62390
62520

SAVE 150%

\$4999 ~~\$6899~~

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64837901

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

3/8" x 14 FT. GRADE 43 TOWING CHAIN

HaulMaster

Item 97711 shown

LOT NO. 97711/60658

SAVE 55%

\$1999 ~~\$44.99~~

REG. PRICE \$44.99

64795874

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10 FT. x 17 FT. PORTABLE GARAGE

HFT

Item 69039 shown

LOT NO. 69039/60727/62286

SAVE 120%

\$17999 ~~\$299.99~~

REG. PRICE \$299.99

64772347

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WOW SUPER COUPON!

1/2" INDUSTRIAL QUALITY SUPER HIGH TORQUE IMPACT WRENCH

SCREW FACTORY

Item 68424 shown

LOT NO. 68424

SAVE 55%

\$7499 ~~\$129.99~~

REG. PRICE \$129.99

64775929

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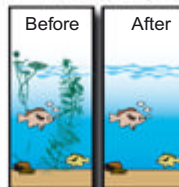
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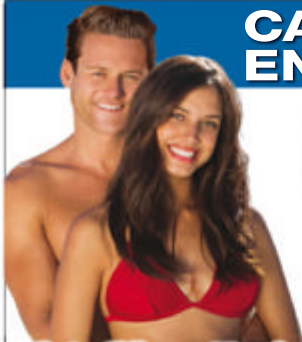


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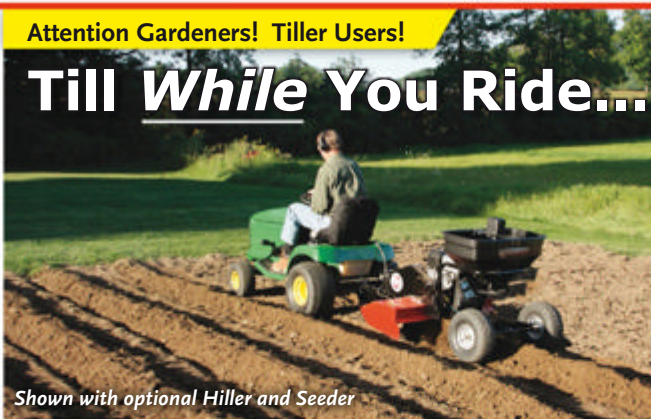
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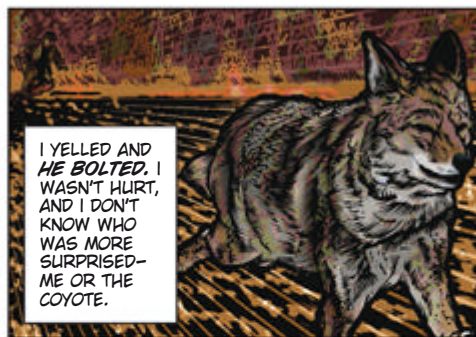
TEN MINUTES LATER, I STARTED YELPING AGAIN, THIS TIME I **IMMEDIATELY SPOTTED MOVEMENT** OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE. I TURNED TO LOOK...



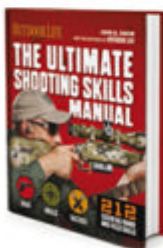
I REALIZED MY ATTACKER WAS A COYOTE. AS I STRUGGLED TO MY FEET, I THREW THE DOG TO THE GROUND. IT STARED AT ME, **READY TO POUNCE** AGAIN. BUT MY SHOTGUN LAY OUT OF REACH.



...AS A GRAY BUNDLE OF FUR BARRELED INTO ME. THE FRENZIED PREDATOR **SNAPPED AND SNARLED**, TWISTING IN MY ARMS AS IT TRIED TO BITE DOWN ON MY HANDS!



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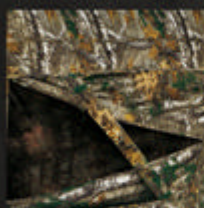


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